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Connecting Threads: Quilts as Symbols in Adolescent Literature

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Connecting Threads:

Quilts as Symbols in Adolescent Literature
(TITLE)

BY

Anita L. Beaman

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Thesis Abstract
Connecting Threads:
Quilts as Symbols in Adolescent Literature
By
Anita Beaman

Quilting is a functional art form that has been practiced by generations of American women. In the past, quilting provided women with an outlet for personal expression. Learning to quilt acted as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. Quilting provided women with a means of recording their personal histories as well as an opportunity for socializing: quilting bees were social occasions that allowed women to gather together and establish connections with each other as they connected their quilt pieces.

Feminist history has recognized the quilt as an important symbol for women. Quilts represent strength, resiliency and the creative spirit that allowed women to cope with death, poverty and other hardships. In texts for adolescents , quilts are used to help women overcome such hardships and represent the strong bonds of love and family that female characters create within the home. Examining adolescent novels that make use of the quilt as a symbol reveals a series of images reflecting the role of women and young girls as storytellers, historians and keepers of the family. The way feminine roles are depicted accurately illustrates not only the community between women established by quilting, but also the strong bonds that quilts symbolize between generations of women.

The connections made between characters within the stories while stitching together the quilts are vital to the development of young women. Young girls need connections to grow and communicate, and a united family, represented in adolescent novels by the patchwork quilt, provides these connections. In these

novels, the creation of quilts helps characters explore issues of trust, love and acceptance of themselves and others. The quilt acts as a unifying force for women in young adult novels in much the same way it acted as a connecting force among women in the past. This sense of unity encourages feminine development, and the quilt acts as a material manifestation of the young girl's coming of age.

The quilts in adolescent novels act to bring together female characters through history and across time. Adolescent novels often use quilts to represent family history and connections passed through generations of characters. In this way, the quilt as a symbol in adolescent literature mirrors its role in women's histories. Historically, by uniting women and providing an artistic outlet when few others were offered, quilts offered new meaning to what began as a simple domestic task. In adolescent novels, the creation of quilts becomes a labor of love uniting characters, telling stories, and providing a means of expression for women.

In memory of

my grandmother, Nadine May Beaman,

whose quilts inspired me.

Grandma,

Thank you for stitching so many connections.

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I owe special thanks to my parents, Bob and Martha Beaman, and my family, especially the quilters. They were the inspiration for this project, and the bonds I share with them will last even longer than Grandma's quilts.

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Introduction

Connecting Threads: Quilts as Symbols in Adolescent Literature

Quilting is a functional art form that has been practiced by generations of American women. In the past, quilting provided women and girls with an outlet for creative expression and a means to express their innermost thoughts. Piecing quilts allowed women to create a record of their lives. A quilt's patchwork pieces preserved women's feelings and their personal histories and allowed women to connect with each other. Quilting also served as a rite of passage for girls, introducing them to the tasks of womanhood. It provided women with an opportunity for socializing: quilting bees were social occasions that allowed women to gather together and establish connections with each other as they connected their quilt pieces. Because of its useful connection of odd pieces, the patchwork quilt is widely recognized as a symbol of security and family.

Quilting became less popular in the early twentieth century. The years after the Great Depression saw handmade quilts replaced with factory woven blankets and machine-stitched quilts. While these new methods of production continued to accomplish the utilitarian function of quilts, they failed to accomplish many of the social functions quilting once fulfilled. Susan Behuniak-Long, quilt enthusiast and professor of political science at Le Moyne College, believes "eliminating the traditional way of doing things fails to fully replicate all the social functions of the previous method. A substitution of technique may result in a loss of social patterns and community values" (152). The decline in hand piecing of quilts has eliminated an important method of expression and connection for women without providing an adequate replacement. The "loss of social patterns and community values" caused by the dismissal of many traditions has contributed to a disconnected, isolated modern society, peopled with men and women who place decreasing emphasis on preserving social connections.

A resurgence of interest in quilting accompanied the resurgence of the women's movement. Feminist history has recognized the quilt as an important symbol for women: "In a highly mechanized world, quilts stand as statements about social values" (Behuniak-Long 152), especially values important for women. Quilts represent connections, family, stability, and expression of the creative spirit that allowed women to overcome hardships. Quilts are recognized as symbols of these feminine and family values. While much research has been done on quilts as symbols in adult literature, little or no research has centered on the quilt in historical literature for adolescents. The resurgent interest in quilting has led to the use of quilts as symbols in several novels, published within the last thirty years. In texts for adolescents, quilts are used to help young women face the hardships they encounter and to represent the strong bonds of love and family female characters create within the home. Examining adolescent novels that make use of the quilt as a symbol reveals a series of images reflecting the roles of women and young girls as a group, and as individuals, historians and keepers of the family. The way these roles are depicted illustrates not only the community between women established by quilting, but also the strong bonds that quilts symbolize between generations of women.

Young adult novels such as Ann Rinaldi's *Stitch in Time, Broken Days* and *The Blue Door*, Patricia Beatty's *O The Red Rose Tree,* Judith Baker Montano's *Recollections*, Natalie Kinsey-Warnock's *The Canada Geese Quilt*, D. Anne Love's *Bess's Log Cabin Quilt* and Susan Terris's *Nell's Quilt* use quilts as metaphors for the bonds established between women and women's communication with society. The connections made between characters within the stories while stitching together the quilts are vital to the development of these young women and the self-esteem of the older female characters. The recognizable symbol of the patchwork quilt is taken beyond its usual function as a symbol of stability and family and begins to symbolize the voices, womanhood, and sense of shared history that develops within a family.

In the introduction to the 1993 edition of her study *In a Different Voice*, psychologist Carol Gilligan points out the significance of these family ties: "Within the context of U.S. society, the values of separation, independence, and autonomy are so historically grounded. . . that they are often taken as facts: that people are by nature separate, independent from one another, and self-governing" (xiv). Here and in her later study with Lyn Mikel Brown, *Meeting at the Crossroads*, Gilligan shows how these assumptions ignore the importance of emotional connections for women and developing girls. For girls, being accepted, supported and loved by other women provides the validation and encouragement needed to develop the independence valued by society. Connections between people are often ignored or neglected in a society where independence and separateness are valued. However, women continually seek to fulfill the need for connections that help them stay strong. Quilting often provides the means for creating these connections as well as providing a means of individual expression. Many authors use the quilt to symbolize connections between various people, places and events within their work. Adolescent novelists often specifically use quilts to establish ties between young female characters and their female relatives and friends.

Because of its origin within the domestic sphere, the patchwork quilt also serves as a symbol for domestic tasks and traditional women's roles. In history and in adolescent fiction, learning to quilt often symbolizes the beginning of a young girl's passage into adulthood. In adolescent novels, characters often begin piecing a quilt at the beginning of an important transitional period; completing the quilt often signals lessons learned and the completion of a girl's first steps toward adulthood. Quilting teaches the important life lessons of patience, perseverance and economy.

As a form of domestic art, quilting allows women and girls to express creativity while fulfilling their household work. In adolescent novels, quilting allows female characters to assume new voices while remaining within the culturally accepted confines of domesticity. The traditional roles portrayed in the novels take on new meaning

because the product of their work is more than just a quilt; it is a symbol of who they are, what they think and what is important to them. The act of creating the quilt often provides a means of allowing the main character of adolescent novels to connect with the woman she is becoming. This act of creativity allows for acceptable means of self-expression and is used by many young characters. In Susan Terris's *Nell's Quilt,* Nell's character begins her monstrous crazy quilt as an attempt to express the emotional chaos inside her. This method of expression is encouraged by her family and neighbors and eventually consumes Nell. By creating the quilt and then destroying it, she expresses and then separates herself from her inner turmoil. The freedom of self expression allowed in quilting encourages girls to explore hidden thoughts, visions, talents and fears often hidden within. In many stories, such as *Nell's Quilt* and *A Stitch In Time,* what is evident through the text of the quilt does not become evident to the character or the reader until later in the book, after much self-exploration by the character.

Men are usually excluded from quilting, making it a creative expression of women's collective consciousness. The quilt speaks from the women's sphere and of women's experiences, voicing collective opinions, thoughts and concerns. In this way, the quilt represents the history of women. It also offers women a culturally acceptable way to express themselves within society, serving as a forum for opinions that could not be expressed openly but were covertly expressed through art and needlework. In *Nell's Quilt*, Nell cannot express in a socially acceptable manner the frustration she feels at being forced to marry.

The quilt metaphor is altered when men become involved. While the quilts in novels with male characters still represent connections, the quilts used by men often represent connections with the outside world as well as connections within the family. In *The Dream Quilt* by Amy Zerner and Jessie Spicer Zerner, Alex is fascinated by his great-great-grandfather's quilt and all the exotic locations it represents. Each night while sleeping under the quilt, Alex travels to new places in his dreams. Alex's quilt represents

exotic imaginings rather than the familiarities of home represented in women's quilts. Despite this difference, Alex's quilt connects him with his great-great-grandfather and develops Alex's security and independence. These are the same types of connections and developments experienced by women quilters.

In literature, quilts are used to signify connections between the public and private self, family members and other women, women and society and women and their history. By examining adolescent novels, it is possible to explore these connections, how they are symbolized through the use of the patchwork quilt and their relevance to women's lives. Throughout history, quilts have served to connect many women through time and distance. The threads that bind together quilt blocks hold together much more; bound up within quilts are the thoughts, emotions and beliefs of the women that created them. Examining the use of quilts in adolescent literature reveals characters creating and strengthening connections important for their own development. The quilt is a particularly powerful symbol for young people because adolescence is an important developmental time for women. Quilting, and quilts in literature, connect not only people but themes of emotional development, self-expression, collaboration and history. By using quilts as symbols in their work, writers connect the threads in the cloth of life and family in the same way quilters sew together the blocks of a quilt.

Chapter 1

Voice Patterns:
Quilting as a Means of Creative Expression

Quilting is an anonymous art practiced by countless American women. It is a means of expression that reflects the position of women in society and in the creative world. The quilt, "rarely dated or signed, summarized in bits of colored cloth the major themes of a woman's life. In quilts . . . a woman said everything she knew about art and survival" (Bank 11). In the past, quilting was the only artistic medium open to many women. For women too poor to purchase paints or take music lessons, and women unable to write, quilting was a practical, cost-efficient art form that was available to all women, regardless of social or economic position. Quilting, as an art form, provided many silent women with a means to voice their concerns, thoughts, and experiences as women.

In a Different Voice, Carol Gilligan's study of psychological theory and women's development, explores women's perceptions of reality and truth, "how we know, how we hear, how we see, how we speak" (xii). She recognizes the difference between the voices of women and the voices of men, and the absence of women's voices in the record of human experience. She questions "theories in which men's experience stands for all of human experience - theories which eclipse the lives of women and shut out women's voices" (xii). Women were not encouraged to publicly voice their experiences, but often they recorded their thoughts in very personal ways; journals, letters, art and needlework contain the hidden half of human experience, the half concealed within the hearts and minds of generations of women. By carefully choosing color, pattern and design, women used quilts to record and preserve parts of themselves. Women used and created patterns drawn from literature, politics, and household items. Patterns such as "Mariner's

Compass" or "Ocean Waves" may have symbolized a woman and her family's relationship with the sea. One woman inscribed these words on a quilt she called "Ship of Life": "The great ship of life, gliding over the sea of time, bound to the shore of eternity, the anchor cast on the Rock of Ages" (*Hearts and Hands*). In pattern and verse, this New England sea captain's wife captured the spirituality and faith that carried her through life. Other patterns, such as "Baskets" or "Grandmother's Flower Garden" symbolized women's ties to the home; women drew from their own experience within the domestic sphere to express themselves creatively.

Alice Walker's exploration of her own mother's creativity and experience offers insight into the minds of countless anonymous women: "they dreamed dreams that no one knew - not even themselves. . . and saw visions no one could understand" (389). These visions often became part of their quilts, their one means of expression. Patchwork and quilting became a powerful medium for communication and creativity among women who ". . .forced their minds to desert their bodies and their striving spirits sought to rise like frail whirlwinds from the hard red clay. And when those frail whirlwinds fell, in scattered particles, upon the ground, no one mourned . . ." (Walker 389). Many women did not mourn the scattering of their spirits because they saved the pieces and stitched them into their quilts. Women's voices were kept alive through the piecing together of particles; connecting the threads of their spirits fed women's souls and fueled the fire of creation.

Fabric was an important part of life in early America, a part particularly important to women. The creation and use of cloth was an integral part of a woman's domestic duties. Quilt collector and scholar Roderick Kiracofe points out that, in early America, "almost all women had intimate knowledge of the steps of cleaning, spinning, weaving, and dyeing [cloth], having performed the tasks themselves or watched their mother or grandmother do them" (7-8). Women respected and valued fabric; before the industrialization of cloth production, women made all the fabric they used in their homes.

Much of their time was used in carding and weaving, as well as sewing. Because of this, "throughout history, women have had a special relationship with fabric. It is the medium to which they have turned again and again to express their creativity" (7). It is the medium that is most familiar, most acceptable, and most readily available to them. Quilting, according to quilter Radka Donnell, is an activity born of silence, the habitual and enforced silence of women: "It is as if I always have to deal first with silence, with everything in myself and in the outside world that is silent. If I am to lift ideas and images out of silence, I must do so without offending or betraying the silence itself" (1). Historically, by speaking through fabric, a medium traditionally controlled by women, women did not betray the silence; they spoke out while staying within the confines of social acceptability. Donnell feels silence is "a *product* and a *productive force* of women" (2, emphasis Donnell's); women draw from their silence the strength and inspiration to create truly unique and forceful voices.

In her novel *How to Make an American Quilt,* author Whitney Otto uses quilting to allow her characters to overcome silence. The narrator, Finn, recognizes quilting as a significant means of expression for Anna Neale, the seventy-three year old founder of her grandmother's quilting group: "This is what it is like with your [Anna's] quilts; you simply design and stitch them. You say nothing more than what you have said with fabric and thread" (176). For Anna, an African-American woman and former house servant, quilting is the safest, quietest way to express her thoughts and experiences. She, a former servant and single mother, finds her voice and strength as the leader of the group of quilters. Quilts embody the voice of their creator; quilts that do not contain the creator's voice, or story, are "just something to fill the long evening spent without companionship" (175). Women's stories can only be told by women themselves; quilts are individual creations that cannot always be shared with other women. Otto's character Anna Neale believes stealing another woman's quilt design is like stealing her story, a piece of her self (179).

All women need to feel their stories belong to them; they need to feel their words are valid and valuable. The issue of personal voice is particularly relevant to adolescent girls who are searching for their own words and the courage and ability to express them. According to Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule's *Women's Ways of Knowing,* "All women grow up having to deal with historically and culturally engrained definitions of femininity and womanhood - one common theme being that women, like children, should be seen and not heard" (5). Adolescent girls are entirely stripped of their voice; as children, they are forced to be silent, and, upon entering womanhood, they are continually forced into silence in a society where their voices hold no value. Changing values and views of women now allow women more opportunities to speak out, but women often find themselves lacking the ability to speak. For this reason, the issue of voice is one particularly important in modern novels for young girls. For society to learn to value women's voices, women must first learn to speak; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule found that "language is a tool for representing experience, and tools contribute to creative endeavors only when used" (25). By practicing a creative endeavor, such as quilting, women discover a means of expression and begin to use it to express their inner voices and end the silence of their existence. Authors of young adult literature recognize quilting as a means of expression and use quilts in their novels as a symbol for the words young women do not possess or cannot use.

Words are often used effectively in Ann Rinaldi's adolescent novel *A Stitch in Time;* they are weapons in the war waging within the Chelmsford household. Hannah Chelmsford's character becomes a master at learning when to speak out and when to be silent, learning when to use her words as weapons and as tools. In a home rife with anger and secrecy, Hannah continually attempts to keep the peace between her battling family members: "If I didn't, we might all kill each other. Not with guns. . . .but with words, the way civilized people kill each other every day" (16). In their study, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule found many women perceive words as weapons: "Words were

used to separate and diminish people, not to connect and empower them" (24). As a woman, Hannah Chelmsford recognizes this and chooses carefully when to speak and when to stay silent. Hurtful words separate the members of the Chelmsford family, but for Hannah, sometimes silence is just as hurtful. Hannah argues with her father when he refuses to let her marry the man she loves; she speaks her mind and expresses her wishes, but to no avail. The words exchanged in her arguments with her father were angry and hurtful, but "the silences . . . were even worse" (17). The silences come when Hannah quiets her own voice and submits to her father's; she is silent after the hurtful words have been spoken and she feels separated from her father and her self. She agrees not to marry, sacrificing her dreams of independence and a life away from what she knows in her father's house.

While Hannah learns when to speak and when to remain silent, many around her remain silent as well. There are many secrets in the Chelmsford family. Hannah inadvertently sews some of the family secrets into the quilt she is creating, called "Trust." When she asks for a piece of fabric from her former betrothed, Louis, she "tells" her father she will remain friends with him, despite being forced to refuse the marriage (Rinaldi 218). Hannah requests the first piece of fabric from Richard Lander, her new betrothed, in an impulsive act of love and trust. She finally reaches out to Richard as he leaves on his voyage. The piece of shirt and neckscarf given to her by Richard speak of the trust between them and announce to Hannah's father that she will marry this time, even if he protests (205). When Richard goes to sea, he promises to bring Hannah more suitable fabric for her quilt. When Richard is feared to be dead, the beautiful piece of fabic he sends to Hannah acts as his voice, telling her he is alive and returned home (269).

After searching for a special blue fabric to represent her deceased mother, Hannah decides to use a piece of unfamiliar fabric found in the attic. Months later, when the silence of years is finally broken, Hannah discovers the fabric in her mother's block

comes from the jacket of a British officer. Her mother's brief affair with the man destroyed her unhappy marriage to Nathaniel Chelmsford and resulted in the birth of Hannah's brother, Cabot, and her own death. Hannah's quilt continues to hold the secret; as Hannah's silent voice, it preserves her family's history while telling her mother's story and giving her mother a voice.

In Susan Terris's adolescent novel *Nell's Quilt*, Nell's crazy quilt acts as her own silent voice. Nell dreams of attending college, of going to Boston to help people and work for women's rights, the way her grandmother did. She is a young woman with a strong sense of her self. She shares these dreams with others in her family and with Rob, her best friend. When Nell's voice is silenced by a forced engagement, she turns to her quilt, made from scraps of her grandmother's dresses, for self-expression. Unable to use her own voice, Nell assumes the strong voice of her grandmother through the creation of her quilt.

During her eighteenth year, her last year of high school, Nell's family begins to force her into the voiceless life of a grown woman. Ignoring her desire to speak out, to be educated, and to be active, her parents encourage her to marry a wealthy cousin. Marriage would effectively silence Nell's voice; she would not be able to attend college or work for women's rights. As a wife, Nell's only voice would be her husband's voice. Forced to agree to the marriage for financial reasons, Nell begins to model herself after him: "[H]e's such a diffident, reserved person. I am attempting to become that way, too" (35). In this sense, Anson is unlike other men. A widower, he has assumed many roles traditionally fulfilled by women; he is the nurturer of his daughter, Jewel. As the son of an unusually forceful and outspoken mother, Anson is forced into a silences usually reserved for women. Nell recognizes that Anson possesses the traits usually valued in women and begins to imitate these in her attempt to become a proper wife.

The threat of marriage and the loss of her voice affects Nell drastically. Nell begins immediately to suppress her voice and prepares to become a wife. Instead of

joining her father and Anson, her betrothed, in conversations about politics, as she would have done before, she remains silent (Terris 16). The difference in her personality is immediately apparent to those who know her well. She stops talking to Rob, her former confidant, telling him they "have nothing to talk about" (38). She even becomes afraid of his presence: "I didn't like him being so close. What was he going to do? Hit me for being foul tempered?" (52). Nell's fear of using her own voice reflects the fears of many women and the cause of their silence. In the study *Women's Ways of Knowing,* Mary Belenky et all found a common theme among silent women: silent women often believe words are weapons, and they deserve punishment for using them. Many women revealed they stay silent because they feel they deserved to be hit for "mouthing off" or refusing their husbands' requests (24). Nell, formerly outspoken and confident, has suddenly internalized this fear of speaking her mind. She shares this fear of words with Rinaldi's character Hannah Chelmsford. Both women recognize and respect the power of the spoken word. Hannah is silenced during her fight to marry the man she loves; Nell is effectively silenced by the prospect of marriage to a man she does not love.

Anson Tanner also notices the change in Nell. His response to the change shows how little he knows of her. Instead of being alarmed at her sudden silence, as Rob is, Anson admires her: " 'You've changed in the last half year, Nell. You look somewhat frailer, but you do have a strong spirit and a joy about you. . . . Don't lose these things. They're gifts from the heavens. Teach them to Jewel and, if you will, to me'" (Terris 58). Anson represents society's feelings about women's voices; he admires Nell's silence and hopes she will teach his daughter to be silent as well. Nell's "strong spirit" is being broken, given away to Anson and Jewel, whom she will care for, and leaving her weak and empty.

Nell's parents also admire the change in her: "Mama and Papa are amazed. They cannot believe that I've reined in my wild impulses and been transformed into a ladylike, tractable being who will put up her hair and go to town for tea. Sometimes at night,

while I'm working on my quilt, I see their bemused glances above my head" (Terris 36). Her parents are not at first alarmed by her silence; like Anson, they admire it and feel Nell is finally growing into a proper lady. When Nell denies herself the right to speak, she also denies herself the right to eat, as if by not speaking she ceases to live. Her decreased strength, increased weight loss and other erratic behavior finally alarm her parents in ways that her loss of voice does not.

Five months after agreeing to marry, the only thing Nell can talk about is her quilt. She creates a crazy quilt from scraps of her grandmother's dresses, passed on to the family after her grandmother's death. Nell admires her grandmother, a forceful woman who was active in many causes, including women's rights. Her grandmother was a woman with a very strong voice, and Nell seems to draw some strength from the quilt made from her dresses. When Nell sacrifices her own voice, she begins to live vicariously through her grandmother. While assembling the quilt, Nell imagines all the places her grandmother may have worn the dresses the scraps came from: political rallies, lectures, luncheons with important people like Elizabeth Cady Stanton or Susan B. Anthony. Daydreaming about her grandmother's life is fueled by the fabrics; these daydreams are Nell's escape from her silent reality. Nell experiences her grandmother's life while creating the quilt. This sustains her through the loss of her own voice. It also leads to her obsession with the quilt; the quilt is made for her marriage, but it represents what Nell might have had if she did not have to marry.

Nell completely loses her own voice when Rob, her childhood friend, leaves. Unable to stay and watch Nell starve herself to death or marry Anson Tanner, Rob runs away to become a sailor. After begging Rob to stay, Nell becomes bedridden. She cuts off her hair, disassociating herself from the grown woman she has become. Resembling a young girl, Nell completely loses contact with who she once was and who she has become. The narrative of the novel, in journal form, suddenly switches to third person; Nell does not even have a voice in her own writing. Someone else tells Nell's story,

someone who can read Nell's thoughts and see all her actions. This omniscient narrator may be Nell herself, so far distanced from who she has become that she does not even recognize herself (Terris 91).

Those around Nell still do not recognize the true cause of her illness. Her father, angry at Nell for all the trouble and worry she is causing, continues to silence her:

> "But Papa, no one listens. I wanted college and to go to Boston."
>
> "Dreams. Foolishness."
>
> "I don't wish to lead Mama's life."
>
> "Is your mother's life so bad? Have you ever asked her? Besides, your life was going to be different - living in town with a fine man and a fine child."
>
> "But I didn't want it. Not any of it."
>
> "You're unnatural." Papa said, with a scowl. (Terris 107)

Nell's father feels her desire for her own life, and her own voice, is "unnatural" for a woman. He feels what she is offered should be sufficient: a house, a husband, a child. Nell recognizes that no one, especially her father, listens to her when she talks about her thoughts and dreams, so she becomes silent. Nell begins to see what Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule discovered in *Women's Ways of Knowing:* " 'women's talk, in both *style* (hesitant, qualified, question posing) and *content* (concern for the everyday, the practical, and the intrapersonal) is typically devalued by men and women alike" (17). Nell once valued her own voice, but the continual suppression of her voice by her family and her society has led her to believe her thoughts are less valuable than those of men. Because no one seems to be listening, Nell stops talking and abandons the thoughts that once defined who she was.

Nell's only remaining connection to who she once was, or who she wanted to be, is the quilt. While digging to the bottom of the basket containing her quilting supplies, Nell discovers the quilt's secret: a receipt for the purchase of "three hundred samples [of fabric]. No two alike" (Terris 136). She realizes the quilt fabric did not come from her

grandmother's dresses, as she believed, but was purchased in a department store for a crazy quilt "Grandmother Shaw had purchased but never touched, because it was too insignificant to take up *her* time" (136). Grandmother Shaw did not need to create a quilt to act as her voice; she spoke out through her actions and words. Nell immediately loses interest in the quilt;, it "is a dead thing" (136). It no longer links her to her grandmother or her grandmother's voice; she no longer lives through the quilt. She cannot bring herself to completely let go of it, however. She hangs onto it until she finally finishes it. She embroiders her name in the space left, signifying the completion of her work. The quilt is done; Nell dies it black, lets it dry, and then crawls under it to die. It no longer connects her to her grandmother and who she wanted to be. It represents her failure to be like her grandmother; she has spent her time on something her grandmother could not be bothered with.

As Nell lies under the quilt, ready to end her life, she hears voices. She hears Rob daring her to live, and Ludie, a neighbor's wife, talking about killing her cruel abusive husband to experience life. She hears Jewel, a young girl searching for a voice of her own, her mother, her father, her sister; voices swirl around her and Nell cannot block them out (Terris 161). These voices finally save her. Nell begins to realize she can again add her voice to theirs. Her wedding has been canceled; Anson now plans to marry her sister. She has been freed from the pull of the quilt and no longer lives through her grandmother. She will not be forced to marry and live her mother's hard, silent life. She can emerge from her silence and begin to speak again.

While Nell's quilt symbolizes her loss of voice, other women and girls use their quilts to find and express their own voices, suppressed by society but not completely lost. The quilt in Patricia Beatty's *O the Red Rose Tree* is a very special and unique work of art and an expression of the creator's voice. Sara Hankinson, a poor, old and lonely woman, loves to quilt. For her, it is a way to express her creative impulses and her inner thoughts and feelings. A creative outlet, quilting helps Mrs. Hankinson forget the

sadness and loneliness of her life. Her dream is to create a very special quilt, one she has been planning for over sixty years. "O the Red Rose Tree" is a truly unique, personal quilt, signifying Mrs. Hankinson's desire to speak out after years of silence. As a mother and wife, she did not have the time or opportunity for self expression; the voice of her youth has been lost. Now, as a poor and sick old woman, she is running out of time to preserve the voice of her old age. She is barely literate and totally alone. The creation of "O the Red Rose Tree" is her last chance to share herself and her experiences with others. Because her late husband loved red roses, she designs a large rose tree decorated with seven red roses. "O the Red Rose Tree" is Mrs. Hankinson's masterpiece; it is her way of speaking out of herself and creating a distinct voice.

In the nineteenth century, women did not often design their own unique quilt patterns; instead, they exercised their creativity within traditional patterns. According to Deborah Harding, co-editor of *America's Glorious Quilts* "[Quilt patterns] are passed down in families like recipes. In the hands of a dozen women the same pattern can produce a dozen different results. . . . Every experienced quilter delights in changing and improving traditional designs, personalizing them to suit her own idiosyncrasies" (67). Mrs. Hankinson, however, seeks to create a truly special work of art. She has already made most of the tradtional quilt patterns. The "Twinkling Star and Bridal Wreath, Tree of Life, True Lover's Knot, Christmas Star and Indian Hatchet" (Beatty 32) hold no appeal for her; she has done them all. Instead, for this quilt, Mrs. Hankinson creates something from within herself. She must creatively express herself through her quilting; barely literate and very poor, she has no other creative outlet and no other way to voice her experiences. "Oh the Red Rose Tree" represents what is truly unique about Mrs. Hankinson. A product of her talent and creative mind, the quilt represents her innermost feelings, providing her with a way to speak to the world. The use of red roses, her husband's favorite flower, represents her ties to him as a wife and as a woman. Because the Hankinsons had a close and happy marriage, Mr. Hankinson is an important part of

who Mrs. Hankinson has become. However, using the flower preferred by her husband in her own creative masterpiece also indicates Mrs. Hankinson's continuing dependency on her husband's voice. Even as a widow, she is not completely independent from male influence and the imprint of a patriarchal society.

The other quilter in *O the Red Rose Tree* is Grandma Barnett. While Mrs. Hutchinson is creating "O the Red Rose Tree" as an expression of her individual voice, Grandma Barnett expresses the collective voice of many women by creating a quilt using the Women's Christian Temperence Union's pattern. Using the organization's colors of green and white, Grandma Barnett makes a quilt representative of an organization with a huge membership of women (Beatty 36). The WCTU boasted a membership of over two hundred thousand women in the late nineteenth century and supported causes that varied from its primary concern, the prohibition of alcohol, to eight hour work days, child care for working women, vocational training for women, prison reform, and women's suffrage (Ferraro 82). Collectively, the WCTU was a formidable voice, a way for women to express their social and political concerns. Under Francis Willard, president of the WCTU from 1879-1898, "quilts and domestic symbols were . . . banners that brought home into the world of politics." WCTU members often displayed their quilts at rallies and in their headquarters; quilt patterns such as the Temperance Goblet, Drunkard's Path and the "T" for Temperance gave quilts political voice (*Hearts and Hands).*

Grandma Barnett's WCTU quilt embodies the voices and causes of the women of the nineteenth century. In *Nell's Quilt*, her grandmother Shaw does not need to create a quilt because she speaks out through her actions and her continual involvement with social activism. However, many women, like Grandma Barnett, speak only through cloth. By creating the quilt, Grandma Barnett is adding her voice to those of many other women speaking out for reform. By becoming active in the WCTU, "the women. . . leaped from their spheres. They [took] the notion to speak for themselves" *(Hearts and Hands*). Grandma Barnett is a forceful character, so outspoken that she often offends and

injures those around her. Grandma Barnett shares the other members' abilities to speak out and express themselves.

Before the WCTU and similar organizations existed, women had no active voice in politics. During the early and middle eighteenth century, few women spoke out in public about political and social reform; while many women had opinions on these matters, it was not considered acceptable for women to discuss them. Women who did speak publicly encouraged other women to voice their opinions by whatever means were available to them. Activist Sarah Grimke encouraged women to uses quilting and other needlework to express their discontent with slavery. She hoped "the prick of our needles [may] prick the conscience of the slaveholder" (*Hearts and Hands*). Political sentiment among women developed into quilt patterns such as "Slave Chain" and "Underground Railroad" during the 1850s and "Drunkard's Path" and the Temperance goblet later in the century.

The political opinions expressed in many quilts prove nineteenth century women held and expressed their own views about public issues. Many early American women used fabric and quilting to record their social and political opinions as well as their innermost thoughts. Quilts contain the thoughts of women that had no words. The quilts in adolescent novels tell stories without a voice; they offer silenced young women a way to speak out when they cannot say what they are thinking or feeling. The quilts tell stories and share thoughts and feelings that words cannot express. Quilts not only act as creative outlets for these characters, they share the inner voices of their creators with everyone who sees them. When these women "dreamed dreams that no one knew - not even themselves. . . and saw visions no one could understand" (Walker 389), they turned these visions into patchwork, and gave their dreams life in the only way they knew how. "Listening" to women's quilts in historical fiction reveals a chorus of silent female voices, carried across time through the threads they connected.

Chapter 2

Stitching Her Stories: Recording History in Quilts

Antique and heirloom quilts are often valued because of their history. In this sense, collectors of antiques are also collectors of history. Collectors of antiques value "the beauty of the bit of silver or wood or cloth not only for itself but for the enduring romance of men and women who lived and loved and, dying, left inanimate possessions still to serve as witnesses of their spirit" (Finley 25). Handmade quilts, stitched carefully with love and dedication, particularly embody the spirits and histories of the women who created them. For this reason, they are often valued by collectors. However, they retain even more value for the descendants of the quilter, who can often find their own history stitched into quilts created by mothers and grandmothers.

Because quilters put so much of themselves into their quilts, it is not surprising that quilts very often come to contain the stories of the lives of their creators and the history of their culture. Roderick Kiracofe, author of *The American Quilt: A History of Cloth and Comfort* believes "the history of quits is embedded in our culture, and conversely, the history of our culture is stitched into our quilts" (5). "Reading" a quilt often reveals a very personal history and a multitude of stories. Quilts created by women are a part of the domestic sphere; they tell the stories of the home through the eyes of women. Women are the keepers of the family and the recorders of their families' history. The history of nations has been traditionally told by men; the history of the family has long been the domain of the woman; it resided within her sphere and remained her responsibility. Since the quilt has long been an art form controlled and practiced by women, it is fitting that it be used as a symbol of feminine history.

The production of fabric is an important part of women's history. Before the industrialization of fabric production in the early nineteenth century, women produced

the fabric for their families in their homes. Spinning, weaving and dying fabric was an important part of women's duties. Keeping a growing family clothed consumed a great deal of women's time. Authors of historical fiction realize the importance of the task and give it a significant place in novels written about the period. Because women learned to spin and weave during their adolescence, novels for and about adolescent girls contain stories that illustrate the importance of fabric production in the lives of women in pre-industrial America. In Rachel Field's Newbery Honor book, *Calico Bush*, the Sargent family and Marguerite, their hired girl, move north into the Maine wilderness in the summer of 1743, taking their family possessions, including a spinning wheel, with them. When the spinning wheel is lost during a storm, Dolly Sargent finds herself unable to spin cloth to make clothes for her family. Dolly must barter with a neighbor to have the Sargent family's cloth spun. A neighbor woman, Aunt Hepsa, spins cloth for the Sargents with the help of Marguerite and the two Sargent girls. Aunt Hepsa's weaving shed represents the importance of cloth production in her life; she has a separate shed to house her spinning wheel, loom, dye pots and wool. Spinning, weaving and dying takes a great deal of Aunt Hepsa's time. The dye pots, when boiling, must be "stirred twice a day until it comes . . . and where I'm to get the time to color all this wool and spin it into cloth I don't know" (52). When the time does come to do the spinning, the Sargent girls and Marguerite help Aunt Hepsa with the cloth. She teaches Marguerite to use the loom while the girls wind thread onto corn cobs (104).

Cloth production changed drastically in the early nineteenth century, when power looms and large cotton mills became popular in many New England towns. The industrialization of fabric production led to fewer tasks for women at home; they could now buy ready-made cloth at more affordable prices. The factories also offered young women an opportunity for independence. Young, unmarried women staffed the mills, flocking to mill towns like Lowell, Massachusetts from farms and towns all over New England. For the first time, women had the opportunity to earn money for themselves

outside the home through the traditional task of fabric production. The mill towns were constructed to cater to the young women, offering boarding houses, shops, libraries and lectures. Many young women escaped the drudgery of farm work in the mills, where the work was just as hard but paid better. Salaries were often saved for schooling or sent home to help support families left behind. Some girls spent the salaries they earned in the mills on the fabric they created, sewing dresses, doing fancy needlework and piecing quilts. The increase in ready-made fabric increased the production of quilts; more fabric allowed for more scraps to go into patchwork.

Despite the advantages the mills offered girls, the business of fabric production become oppressive to the young mill operatives. As factory conditions worsened, the workers began to search for ways to improve their situations. The modern labor movement was born in the Lowell mills, when young women began to join together to demand better pay and better working conditions from their male employers. The opportunities fabric production offered these women also provided them with an opportunity to speak out and express their needs as no other women had ever done. The fabric produced by the mill workers was a symbol of the power and the history of these strong young women.

Several of the Lowell workers recognized the patchwork quilt as a symbol of feminine history. In 1845 a mill worker published an essay entitled "The Patchwork Quilt" in *The Lowell Offering,* the literary publication of the Lowell mill employees. The lives of the mill workers were woven into the production of cloth, and the lives of many of them were also stitched into the quilts they created from the fabric they helped to produce. In "The Patchwork Quilt," the author tells the story of her patchwork quilt and, through it, the story of her own life: "But how many passages of my life seem to be epitomized in this patchwork quilt" (Eisler 152). The centerpiece of the quilt comes from her mother's easy chair, another patch comes from the dress she wore to dancing school. Other pieces come from the garments of friends and family; one very important

piece comes from the first dress the quilter bought with her own hard earned money. The quilt has passed through life with the quilter, through her childhood when she learned to quilt, through her teen years when she neglected it, and into adulthood, when it was passed on to her soon-to-be-married sister. The same sister died under the quilt, and it came back to its creator, a momento of the past and a bit of living history (154).

The quilts in adolescent literature also tell stories and preserve history. In these novels, characters often stitch stories into quilts and use quilts to record family history. Old quilts are sometimes passed on to new owners, and with them the family's history. By continually creating and passing on heirloom quilts, the women and girls in adolescent novels become and remain the keepers of the family. They are the storytellers, the ones who remember and pass on who and what came before. The connection the preservation of history provides with other women is important for young girls. In these novels knowledge of history through the possession of a family quilt connects these young girls to the women in her family who came before her. In life and in literature, the quilt is a tangible connection and document of family history.

In *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development*, Carol Gilligan and Lyn Mikel Brown study the importance of connections between women and how these connections influence the development of adolescent girls. They find "adolescence is a time of disconnection, sometimes of disassociation or repression in women's lives, so that women often do not remember - tend to forget or to cover over - what as girls they have experienced and known" (4). Disassociation from the past also disassociates girls from the present and the future, isolating them and causing a crisis of identity that contributes to loss of self and loss of voice for many young women. Severing ties with the past causes adolescent girls to forget what they have learned as children and doubt what they feel as young women. In young adult novels, a record of family history provides a necessary connection and reminder for developing women. Quilts that represent family ties and history remind these women of who they are, what

they have experienced, and what they know. The record of their history provides them with a past that is undeniable, allowing them to move with more confidence into their futures as women.

Judith Baker Montano's novel *Recollections* tells the story of a quilt that "spans many generations" of a family (15). After her Grandmother Nan's death, eight-year-old Emma receives a crazy quilt made from many different pieces of fabric. Each piece of fabric is important. Emma's mother recognizes the importance of the quilt and tells Emma "In many ways it is the story of our family all sewn up in a beautiful little crazy quilt" (16).

While sleeping under her grandmother's crazy quilt, Emma begins to dream. Nan did not share the stories the quilt holds with Emma before she died, so she returns to Emma in her dreams and shares all the family history recorded in the quilt. Each piece holds a special memory for Nan, and she hopes sharing her memories with her granddaughter will help Emma cope with grief. Nan may have used the quilt to voice her feelings as she pieced it, but now she uses the stories she recorded in the quilt to teach her granddaughter about family history. *Recollections* is not a story about Nan finding her voice; it is a story about Emma's history and identity.

Nan shows Emma the fabric taken from Nan's parents' clothing. The contrast between the Harris tweed taken from her father's coat and the soft fabric from her mother's evening dress represent the very different personalities of the couple (29). Looking at the fabric, the young Emma begins to know and recognize her great-grandparents and their stories. Nan's Aunt Lydia, an actress and women's right's advocate, is represented by a block of purple cloth and ostrich feather tips with the words "Education = Freedom; Life = Education" embroidered across the bottom of the block (88). The bright and distinctive block reflects the personality of the woman it represents, and Nan passes the story of her Aunt Lydia on to Emma with the quilt. Photos and other messages included on the quilt blocks prompt Nan to share stories of her own marriage,

her children's lives and other important family incidents with her young granddaughter.

At the end of their time together, just before Emma awakes, Nan instructs her, "Remember to take good care of my little quilt. One day you will pass it along to your children, and you'll have to pass on all the history of the fabric pieces" (133). In this way, the history of the family will be preserved; the personalities, relationships and stories that shape the family will continue to live in the generations of decendents that keep the quilt.

Nan shares her stories with Emma because she recognizes their importance. She recognizes her granddaughter's grief at her own death, and she realizes the history she can share with Emma through the quilt can provide stability, confidence and a sense of self that will help carry Emma through her grief into her adolescent years and adulthood. When Emma begs Nan to allow her to stay in their dreamland, Nan tells her, "Emma, you come from a family of traditions and dreams. I want you to carry on and to live your life to the fullest. I want you to experience all the ups and downs of living, to learn the lessons life holds for you" (Montano 131). Nan's stories about the quilt and the history it represents are intended to give Emma the strength to go on and face the life ahead of her as a strong woman. The quilt will serve as a reminder of what Emma knows as a child and will not allow her to disconnect or disassociate herself from her experiences. Judith Baker Montano implies because of Emma's knowledge of her own family background, Emma will be able to live a full life and pass the family's history to her own daughter, thus continuing the tradition of love and support begun by her own grandmother.

In Ann Rinaldi's *The Quilt Trilogy,* the quilt created by Hannah Chelmsford and her sisters also contains the story of the Chelmsford family and preserves their history for future generations. The family's history and future is tightly intertwined with the production of fabric and the creation of the family quilt. As producers of cloth and mill owners, it is fitting that the Chelmsfords' history be recorded in fabric.

The three Chelmsford sisters work together on a quilt Hannah calls "Trust,"

something often absent in the Chelmsford household. Each of the patches on the quilt is made from fabric belonging to someone the girls trust. Because of this, the quilt records the relationships and stories of all three Chelmsford sisters. When they part ways, the quilt is divided as well: one piece remains in Salem, Massachusetts with Hannah; another leaves under Abigail's arm as she elopes with her sea-captain lover, and the last piece goes west to Ohio with Thankful Chelmsford. The quilt prevents the sisters from totally disconnecting themselves from each other or their past; although they are separated, it serves to keep them connected in a lasting way.

Hannah remains in her father's house after her sisters leave, caring for the family home and their developing business, waiting for Richard Lander, her fiancé, to return from sea and marry her. As time passes, Richard earns two blocks on Hannah's quilt. Richard is the first person Hannah begins to trust after the end of her affair with former fiancé Louis Gaudineer. Richard inspires her to trust him and accept his promise of marriage, prompting her to request the first quilt block. She makes the request for the block, made of a piece of his shirttail and a silk neckscarf, the night he leaves on a dangerous voyage. This block represents a promise made: Richard will return to Salem and marry Hannah (*A Stitch in Time* 205). The second piece is added to the quilt when Richard returns from his voyage. Richard has fulfilled his promise, and such an act deserves a special place on the quilt. Richard's second block is made from rare and beautiful silk, brought to Hannah from Sumatra, Richard's mysterious destination. The piece of silk represents a promise fulfilled; Richard has returned home safely (269) and they will soon wed. It also represents Hannah's growing ability to trust and love again.

Louis Gaudineer, frontier scout and Hannah's former lover, also has a place on the quilt. Made from a piece of homespun fabric, Louis's block represents the trust that develops between him and Hannah after she has refused to marry him, when she agrees to raise his half-Indian baby. Louis's quilt block represents a painful chapter in Hannah's history; forced by her father to refuse Louis's offer of marriage, Hannah continues to

have very special feeling for Louis even after her engagement to Richard (*A Stitch in Time* 219). The quilt block records this chapter in Hannah's life and immortalizes her feelings for Louis and the trust that develops between them.

The centerpiece of Hannah's quilt is her mother's block. Hannah's lack of trust for people has roots in her parents' difficult marriage and her mother's death. Because her mother's things were destroyed after her death, Hannah uses a piece of blue fabric found in the attic for her mother's block. After beginning work on the block, Hannah discovers the fabric came from the remains of a British naval officer's uniform. Her mother had a brief affair with a British officer before her death, ruining her already unhappy marriage to Nathaniel Chelmsford (*A Stitch in Time* 72). It is not until later, when the quilt block is complete, that Hannah discovers the man is her brother Cabot's father. Her mother saved the coat as a momento of a brief but happy affair with Captain William Barnaby. The secret of her brother's birth is contained within the blue fabric. Stitched into the family quilt, this family secret becomes a piece of history preserved for future generations.

Stories are also told by the pieces not included in the quilt. Mr. Chelmsford, Hannah's father, wishes her to include Mr. Leonard in the quilt because he is a trusted partner in the construction of one of America's first cotton mills. The construction of the mill is the first step in the industrialization of America; mills of its kind will someday build the city of Lowell, Massachusetts and revolutionize the production of fabric. Despite the significance of the partnership and her father's trust in Mr. Leonard, Hannah refuses to include him in her quilt. Trust does not exist between Hannah, the quilt's creator, and Mr. Leonard. She is not interested in recording the history of industry or business; she is interested in the history within her home and family. By refusing to allow Mr. Leonard to be represented in her quilt, Hannah asserts herself as the historian of the Chelmsford family. She decides what stories and memories will be passed on to future generations. The obvious omission of Mr. Leonard from the quilt serves as a

record of his personality and Hannah's feelings for him. Hannah's determination to leave Mr. Leonard out of the quilt serves as a reminder of her purpose for creating the quilt: recording relationships based only on trust.

The quilt becomes a significant symbol and record for later generations of Chelmsfords. In *Broken Days*, the second book in *The Quilt Trilogy,* Thankful Chelmsford's piece of the quilt returns to her family in Massachusetts. Thankful, abducted by the Shawnee during her trip west, has built a life for herself as Much Favored, a well-loved member of her village. The piece of quilt that was tucked away in her saddlebag when she was abducted remains her only tie to her white family. It is a fabric history of Thankful Chelmsford's life, and now includes the stories and relationships of the Shawnee woman Thankful becomes. When she is discovered by Louis Gaudineer years after her abduction, Thankful refuses to return to her family with him, but she sends a message to Hannah: "Tell her I am working on my piece of the quilt. Tell her it is fashioned out of doeskin and some beaded fabric. She would not recognize it now, but tell her, just the same" (*A Stitch in Time* 292). The quilt tells the story of the woman's life. It is not just the quilt Hannah would not recognize; she would not recognize the girl, Thankful, in Much Favored, the woman she has become.

When she dies, Thankful's piece of the quilt contains not only the history of Thankful Chelmsford, but also the history of Much Favored as she lives among the Shawnee. Her daughter, Walking Breeze, realizes: "It had been a white woman's quilt . . . . Now part of it still had pieces of fabric from her mother's early life. But over the years her mother had added pieces of deerskin decorated with beads, a bit of fox fur here, some mink there, some bits of Indian blanket, and other fragments of her new life" (*Broken Days* 12). Walking Breeze returns Much Favored's history to the Chelmsford family when she delivers the quilt to them after her mother's death. To prove who she is, Walking Breeze shares the quilt, and her mother's history, with the Chelmsford family: "There were many fine buckskins in it . . . And a piece of buckskin from my father's

shirt. And a bit from Star Watcher's dress. . . And there was a bit of cloth from something I wore as a baby. Also some from a hunting shirt of Cat Pouncing's. And best of all, there was a bit of deerskin from the leggings of Tecumseh's" (153). When Walking Breeze loses the quilt, she also loses her history and her place in the Chelmsford's family. It is not until the quilt is found and presented to Hannah that Walking Breeze, now called Nancy, can take her place among her mother's family. The loss of the quilt reflects Walking Breeze's loss of identity; she struggles to come to terms with who she is and who she is to become in the white man's world. It is not until her history is returned to her that she remembers who she is and realizes who she will become. The quilt and its history are a tie to her past, a past she needs to embrace to be able to move into her future and accept her new identity as Nancy Chelmsford.

Keeping the quilt, Nancy keeps a bit of her own past. After using the quilt to prove her identity, Nancy makes a place for herself among the Chelmsfords, but she keeps the quilt to remind her of her mother's life and her own Shawnee roots. Many years later, as the director of the printworks in her grandfather's mill, Nancy displays her quilt on the wall of her office. She uses many of the patterns in the quilt as inspiration for the calico print produced in the Chelmsford mill. In this way, Nancy shares a bit of her own history with others and preserves her mother's memory (*The Blue Door* 186).

Abigail Chelmsford Videau's story is told through her own piece of the quilt in the last book of the trilogy, *The Blue Door*. When she leaves her father's house in Salem, Abby takes her piece of the quilt with her. Many years later, Abby, now an aged southern lady and plantation owner, presents her part of the quilt to her granddaughter, Amanda, to return to the family in Massachusetts. The quilt is now a complete record of Abby's life, with "a peculiar looking bird" forming its centerpiece. Abby tells Amanda:

> That bird was drawn on the back of a letter grandfather Nate sent me in 1808 from aboard the rebuilt *Swamp Fox*. . . He was anchored in a cove in the Canaries, sick with fever and eluding [the British] when he wrote me

> the letter. . . This bit of fabric is from the jacket of Captain Barr of the *Suffolk*. . . These two squares are from friends of his who opened their home to us in the Canary Islands after the wreck. This is a patch from Liddy's dress. She and her husband, Merlin, were your grandfather's servants. . . a piece of Jemmy's [Abby's oldest son] uniform coat from when he was hit on the *Constitution.* (*The Blue Door* 54-56)

Nearing the end of her life, Abby sends her granddaughter and her piece of the quilt, her history, home to her family. She is the only one remaining of her brothers and sisters. Of her immediate family, only her father is still alive. Realizing she will not live forever, she passes her quilt and the history it contains to her granddaughter.

When Amanda reaches Lowell, Massachusetts, the Chelmsford family's new home, she loses the quilt. Like Walking Breeze, she presents herself to the Chelmsford family without her past and is rejected. Ironically, it is Walking Breeze, now Nancy, who senses that Amanda is a member of the Chelmsford family. Nancy shares the family history with Amanda, telling her the stories of the other two pieces of the quilt. Amanda realizes "she was stitching together a picture of the family for me. Deliberately and bit by bit. In the same way she had made her quilt" (*The Blue Door* 211). By doing this, Nancy begins to connect Amanda to the past she has temporarily lost and introduce her to other parts of her family and history. Nancy's stories remind Amanda of her experiences and her identity.

In an interesting reflection of Brown and Gilligan statement that "adolescence is a time of disconnection . . . so that women do not remember - tend to forget or to cover over - what as girls they have experienced and known" (4). After Amanda loses the quilt during a riverboat accident, she is forced to assume the identity of another passenger to protect herself from a man pursuing her. Assuming a different identity disconnects Amanda further from her past and what she knows. Symbolically, Amanda also loses her voice when she becomes Clara. Her southern drawl is not consistent with her new, native

New England identity, therefore Amanda cannot speak while she is known as Clara. Her loss of voice can be related to her loss of knowledge. She has temporarily lost her history and her identity, causing a period of confusion and disorientation. Girls' identity is closely intertwined with what they have already learned about themselves, and often what they know about who they are comes from their history. Family history provides girls with a basis for knowledge to explore who they are and who they will become. Amanda, a young girl on the verge of womanhood, becomes mired in confusion when her history is taken from her. It is only when Nancy begins to give it back by telling her stories about the quilt that Amanda becomes conscious of the importance of her own past and her own place in family history. This knowledge allows Amanda to begin development of her own adult self.

The use of the quilt to record history does not stop with Hannah, Abby and Thankful; their descendants continue to record the family's history and even stitch together in the quilt. When Amanda finally recovers her grandmother's portion of the quilt, she, Nancy, and Ebie Chelmsford, who has Hannah's quilt, agree the three sections should be sewn together: "We'll work on it . . .just like Aunt Hannah, Aunt Abigail, and Aunt Thankful would have done" (258). By sewing the pieces of the quilt together, the women symbolically reunite the three Chelmsford sisters and create one great historical document of their lives. The Chelmsford family is no longer disconnected; the bonds of their common history have stitched them together. Within the completed quilt are all the people, the stories and the secrets that have made the Chelmsfords who they are. The three distinct sections of the quilt represent the fragmentation of the family, torn apart by Nathaniel Chelmsford's hatred and resentment. They also represent the distinct personalities and experiences of each of the Chelmsford sisters. Bringing the quilt together over fifty years after it was begun signifies the reunion of the family; old grudges have been resolved or forgotten; secrets have been shared and forgiven.

The men in the novels have little or nothing to do with the quilt; their only

involvement comes when they are asked to share fabric to be included in the quilt. The quilt is controlled exclusively by women. When Nathaniel Chelmsford tries to become involved by forcing Hannah to include Mr. Leonard in the quilt, he is forcefully and effectively shut out. However, the men recognize the power of the quilt, and the family's history, when they accept Walking Breeze and Amanda into the family because they hold pieces of the quilt. Still, it is the women who decide who should be represented in the quilt and what stories it shall tell. By doing this, they determine what stories will last and be passed on to future generations. Stories about Richard Lander's dangerous trade expedition to Sumatra, Thankful's friendship with the chief Tecumseh and Abby's elopement and near death in a terrible hurricane are not stories Nathaniel Chelmsford would have chosen to be recorded in his family's history. Even the secret story of Cabot's birth is included in the patch made of Captain Barnaby's coat. Despite Nathaniel Chelmsford's strong will and determination to be in charge of his children, his daughters take this responsibility from him and quietly, while stitching their quilt, record the truths of the troubled history of their family.

Fabric is inextricably bound with the history of the Chelmsford family. Cloth production helps make the family fortune and even provides the family with its name; author Ann Rinaldi names the fictional family after the original name of the mill town of Lowell, Massachusetts: East Chelmsford (New England Quilt Museum 5). Nathaniel Chelmsford left England because of his family's cloth production, and he gains power and wealth through his own mills. The history of his family is woven into the fabric he produces; Amanda offers Nancy a piece of her own history to be used in the fabric production when she gives Nancy the exotic bird design that forms the centerpiece of her grandmother Abigail's piece of the quilt (189). By using patterns taken from the family quilt, Nancy shares the truth of Abigail's history with a growing number of people and ensures its passage into the next generations. The cotton the mill produces is commonly used in quilts, including those made by the mill workers. By incorporating bits of family

history into the cloth, the Chelmsfords are stitched into the quilts of the many workers whose lives they have affected.

Women began working in the mills at a very young age; some began as early as age eight or ten. Girls at home began to learn to sew and piece quilts as small children. Fabric became an important part of women's lives very early. The mill worker who recorded her history through her patchwork quilt remembered beginning the quilt as a very young girl: "It is one of my earliest recollections. . . when I emerged from babyhood to childhood" (Eisler 150). The young woman's mother exercised "patience and forbearance" while teaching her young daughter the art of quilting, until she developed into a competent seamstress and quilter (150).

Quilting itself is a craft passed on through generations of women. Historically, mothers usually began teaching their daughters to quilt at a young age. While teaching their daughters the art of quilting, mothers often taught them much more. Passing on the knowledge of women, such as quilting, cooking and cleaning, also included passing on the history women recorded in their journals, their family Bibles, their letters, and their quilts. Men recorded history by important events in politics, business and the economy; women through the tasks and events of the heart and home.

Authors of historical fiction for adolescents use the symbol of the quilt in the same way women of the past did. The quilts in many adolescent novels record the history of the characters through the eyes of young women. The quilts act as records, passing on the stories of the family and the events of women's lives to the generations that will come later. This "herstoric" record helps preserve the past for young girls and allows them to connect with their own pasts should adolescence force them to become out-of-touch with their own identities. Through the domestic act of quilting, female characters are able to use their own voices to record their own world, the world of family, home, and those they love. Female authors, recognizing the power of the quilt as a symbol for women, use this metaphor to record history and mark the importance of

quilting in the life of women, an importance shared by the act of quilting.

Chapter 3

Turning the Corners: Quilting as a Rite of Passage

Sewing and quilting were once such integral parts of women's work that learning to sew was an important marker on a young girl's road to womanhood. Nancy F. Cott, author of *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780 – 1835* states eighteenth and nineteenth century women's lives "followed a continuum from childhood upbringing in a family, through adolescent 'apprenticeship' in nurturing and household duties, to wife-and-motherhood" (55). Learning to weave, spin, sew and quilt were important parts of this "apprenticeship" in household duties because the production of fabric and the sewing of cloth were important tasks for women. The amount of spinning and weaving required to clothe one family required constant work. The amount of sewing done in one household necessitated as many hands as possible holding needles, so girls began to sew at a young age. As they grew, their ability with a needle grew as well. Girls sewed simple quilt blocks and samplers during childhood and began stitching clothing, linens, fancy needlework and quilts to fill their hope chests during adolescence. By the time a young woman reached marriageable age she was expected to have completed twelve quilts for her hope chest, as well as sheets, pillowcases, towels, napkins and tablecloths (Blos 37). All the sewing necessary to set up housekeeping was done by hand; therefore, girls started making pieces for their own homes at a young age. Quilter and librarian Susan Meeske points out "young girls were expected to master sewing skills so they could provide clothing and linens for their families when they married. They learned sewing as a trade. This skill was a means of supplementing their families with

income or as a respectable profession were they to remain unmarried" (38). Working as a seamstress was one of the few respectable occupations for unwed women.

As an important skill and part of life for women, different types of needlework became ways to mark different stages in a young woman's life. Many young girls learned the alphabet while stitching letters on a sampler. Young girls often practiced their stitches on simple quilt patterns like "Nine Patch" or by sewing doll clothes. Small girls also wound homespun thread onto spindles for older sisters and mothers to use in their weaving. Young women were often given the tasks of weaving, spinning, bleaching and dying fabric made in the home. According to Nancy M. Cott, "textile manufacture was especially characteristic for unmarried women" (27).

Sewing and quilting were also especially characteristic for unmarried women and young girls. The Lowell mill worker who authored the essay "The Patchwork Quilt" remembered the commencement of the patchwork quilt as the period when she "emerged from babyhood to childhood" (Eisler 150). The start of their first patchwork quilt often began when girls first became old enough to hold a needle and thread. Work on the twelve quilts expected for a dowry commenced early in a girl's life; however, work on the thirteenth quilt did not begin until after the young woman became officially engaged. The thirteenth quilt was a bridal quilt, completed by the hands of the bride's friends and neighbors (Meeske 38).

In the adolescent novel *A Gathering of Days: A New England Girl's Journal, 1830-32*, character Catherine Hall's mother brought the expected twelve quilts with her into her marriage, where they served the family for many years. After her mother's death, Catherine assumes many of the housekeeping duties that were her mother's. When thirteen-year-old Catherine decides to assist someone she believes to be an escaped slave, she gives him one of her mother's quilts to keep him warm on his journey north. The quilt is not missed until another woman joins the household. After her father remarries, Catherine's stepmother discovers the loss of one of the family's handpieced quilts. While

she does not disagree with Catherine's charitable impulses, Mamman scolds Catherine for taking such risks: "And did you not think on the danger to you? What cruel misfortunes might have occurred, harm to you . . . ? Dear child, for you *are* but a child." (Blos 85).

Despite her performance of many women's tasks, Catherine is not yet woman. She is still a confused young girl. Nor has she learned to quilt; when Mamman decides Catherine must make a quilt to replace the one she gave away, Catherine protests: " . . . I know hemming, running and felling, overstitch and buttonhole, but not to make a quilt" (86). Mamman volunteers to teach Catherine, and work commences the following day. Catherine spends several months piecing her quilt, learning to appreciate the work and skill that goes into the creation of a quilt, and she comes to realize how much hard work went into the quilt she gave away. She chooses to piece the "Mariner's Compass" pattern because it is little known in their rural New Hampshire home, and Catherine is intrigued by the information that the quilt pattern is often made by sailor's wives to bring their husbands safely home (Blos 87). Piecing the "Mariner's Compass" gives Catherine direction as well, seeing her safely through the unsafe waters of adolescence and into the port of womanhood. Her father recognizes the appropriateness of the pattern: "It was an apt choice . . . . for are we not, all of us, wand'rers and strangers; and do we not, all of us, travel in danger or voyage uncharted seas? " (135). Catherine immediately associates his words with her escaped slave and her recently departed friend Cassie. She does not associate his words with herself, but Catherine is traveling through the uncharted sea of adolescence, the route through which differs for each girl.

During this time, Catherine truly begins her transition from child to woman, assisted by Mamman's gentle directions and the lessons she learns while piecing her quilt. She has been acting like an adult for many years, performing many tasks in the home and caring for her father and younger sister, but it is not until she begins to piece the quilt that Catherine begins to achieve some emotional maturity. She finally begins to

accept her new stepmother and stepbrother. Catherine's initial response to her new stepmother is negative and rather resentful; she keeps herself apart from Mamman, refusing to develop any ties with her. In her journal, Catherine at first refuses to call her stepmother by any name except "she" or "the Boston woman" (Blos 74). Privately, she criticizes many of her stepmother's actions and takes it very personally when Mamman takes over the womanly duties within the Hall household. This reluctance to form a relationship with a woman is a symptom of adolescence. In their study *Meeting at the Crossroads,* psychologists Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan discovered many adolescent girls begin to disassociate themselves from relationships with women, especially their mothers, in an attempt to prepare themselves for adult relationships with men (216). Catherine is also resentful of the intrusion into her home, and she is unsure about her new place in the family now that she is no longer caretaker and mistress of the house. She begins her relationship with her stepmother with a great deal of resistance, but the creation of her quilt overcomes her reluctance and establishes important ties between them.

Another important event that occurs while Catherine is piecing the quilt is the death of her best friend, which abruptly cuts Catherine off from her carefree childhood days. Her relationship with Cassie is severed just as she begins to establish a relationship with her stepmother. Her childhood friendship is replaced with a deepening bond with he older woman. The act of quilting even provides some solace for Catherine and those around her. While she falls behind with her piecing after Cassie's death, she soon resumes her work, and it is during a discussion about her quilt pattern that the Hall family shares laugher for the first time since Cassie's death (Blos 117).

After completing the quilt, and nearing the end of her journal, Catherine leaves home for the first time to help a family friend several miles away with a new baby. Her departure signifies another step toward adulthood. Finishing the quilt signifies her completion of one of stages of development; her family now feels she is old enough to

leave the shelter of home and take her first independent steps into the world. Leaving distances Catherine from her father and sister, stretching the newly developed ties between Catherine and her stepmother. The events that occur while Catherine is piecing the quilt are those that ask the most of her as a woman; she faces death and birth, dependence and independence in several short months, and she stitches these events and emotions into her quilt. Piecing "Mariner's Compass" helps Catherine develop patience and a sense of direction; these traits, along with the strength she discovers within herself, help guide her through the events of her fourteenth year and through the rest of her life.

Young Bess Morgan's mother begins to teach her the life skill of quilting at age ten. In *Bess's Log Cabin Quilt*, Mrs. Morgan begins teaching Bess to quilt using the simple "Log Cabin" pattern. Bess is really not interested; she would much rather be outside playing. For such a young girl, the hours spent sitting still and quilting pass slowly. By teaching her daughter to quilt, Mrs. Morgan is preparing her daughter to become a woman in the same way she was prepared; she even teaches Bess the same quilt pattern she used to learn quilting (Love 31).

Mrs. Morgan recognizes Bess is already a very grown up little girl. When Mrs. Morgan falls ill while her husband is away, Bess nurses her and takes care of their cabin. Bess begins to perform the tasks of a grown woman, acting as surrogate housekeeper while her mother is sick. When a money lender visits the farm searching for Mr. Morgan and the one hundred dollars Mr. Morgan owes him, Bess assumes one more task. She must earn the money to save their farm. To do this, she takes one of the few paths available to women who needed to earn money: sewing. Bess decides she must finish her quilt and enter it into the quilt contest at the county fair. First prize is two hundred dollars, more than enough money to pay off her father's debt.

After deciding what she must do, Bess assumes the responsibility of saving the family farm. Her mother is too ill to help her; the only assistance the older woman can provide is the twenty-five dollars for the contest entry fee and the quilting lessons she has

already given Bess. For the next three weeks, Bess manages to keep the small Morgan household running and nurse her mother while working to complete her quilt. She voluntarily forfeits any free time she might have for play, instead working diligently on her quilt. The task she formerly disliked now necessarily consumes all her free time. She works late at night and early in the morning, practicing making her stitches tiny and invisible enough to win the first prize. When she finishes, she enters her quilt in the competition with the other women in the community, joining their ranks as a skilled quilter. Bess is the youngest contestant, but her work is good enough to earn a place among the older women. Her presence there is justified when she ties for second place in the contest and wins one hundred dollars in prize money, enough to save her family's farm.

Bess is very young to assume the responsibilities of a grown woman, and the circumstances that force her to do so are short lived. Bess's mother places an unusual amount of trust in her daughter when she gives Bess the money saved for Bess's schooling to cover the cost of the entry fee; many mothers would not place so much faith in their young daughters. However, Mrs. Morgan recognizes Bess's maturity and the necessity of the situation. Upon hearing she has the money for the entry fee, Bess reacts as any excited ten-year-old might. She forgets about the rest of her chores in her anxiousness to begin work on her quilt, and, on her way to milk the cow, she sees "cotton candy clouds mushroomed against the bright autumn sky . . ." (Love 60). Despite the trust placed in her by her mother, and her very grown-up intentions, Bess is still a little girl at heart. The quilt contest is a small patch of adulthood in the quilt of Bess's childhood. She is not really a woman yet, despite her mature actions and personality.

After the fair, her mother recovers, and her father returns home. Because her father has already sent the moneylender one hundred dollars to pay the debt, Bess's prize money becomes hers to keep. Her father promises her he will open her own savings account, and the money will be saved to help send Bess to school when she is older. At

age ten, Bess succeeds at something very few grown women of her time did: making her own money.

Another ten-year-old girl takes her first steps toward womanhood in Natalie Kinsey-Warnock's *The Canada Geese Quilt.* When Ariel's mother announces she is going to have a baby, Grandma suggests she and Ariel collaborate on a quilt for the new baby. Ariel doesn't like to sew, but Grandma encourages Ariel to use her artistic talent to design a quilt that is "a special part" of Ariel, showing what is special to her (25). Ariel draws a picture of her favorite place on their farm, an apple tree with Canada geese flying overhead and cattails underneath. Ariel and Grandma begin work on the quilt, but work is stalled when Grandma suffers from a stroke and becomes bedridden.

Ariel faces the most complex situations of her life during this summer. Like Blos's character Catherine Hall, Ariel faces birth and death and her own maturation. She is very unsure about the new baby, worried that the baby might make everyone forget her. When her grandmother falls ill, she is afraid to see her and avoids the room where Grandma rests. These reactions are typical of a child. Ariel worries about her security in the family, unsure of her place when the new baby arrives. She is confused and frightened by Grandma's illness because of the change it brings to the household and to Grandma. Ariel is also forced to face death for the first time. Although Grandma has survived the stroke, Ariel realizes she will die someday, and the thought is frightening to her.

It is not until Ariel recognizes her mother's pain that she realizes she must face her fears. Knowing her mother is also frightened of losing Grandma comforts Ariel. She realizes her feelings are not childish, although her methods of dealing with them are. She begins to face her fears and visit Grandma each day, talking to her and bringing her things from the farm. It is Ariel who finally convinces Grandma to leave her bed and take an interest in life again. " I forgot life is so good," Grandma tells Ariel in her slurred speech (Kinsey-Warnock 45). Helping Grandma makes Ariel realize how good

life is as well, and she begins work on the baby's quilt where Grandma left off.

Making the quilt involves many sacrifices for Ariel. She does not like to sew, and during the time the book is set, after World War II, sewing and quilting were less important skills for women to learn than they had been in the past. Grandma is a reminder of the past, when quilting was an everyday part of life, but Ariel has different interests and talents. Grandma recognizes and respects Ariel's talents and changing times; instead of using a familiar quilt pattern for the quilt, Grandma breaks with tradition and invites Ariel to design her own.

Ariel, although still a young girl, is adult enough to recognize the quilt's importance to her grandmother, and she is selfless enough to give up her own time to help finish the quilt. She sits inside through many summer days, stitching on the quilt that will belong to the new baby. Ariel is not perfect, however, and she does not take this step toward adulthood without some hesitation. She becomes frustrated with the slow progress of the quilt, and sometimes resents the time she must spend completing it. One autumn day, ten-year-old Ariel bursts out with all the passion of a confined child: "Oh, I'm so sick of sewing! . . . A stupid quilt for a stupid baby! I'm never going to sew again. I hate it. . . . I want to be outside. I hate the quilt and I hate you!" (Kinsey-Warnock 48). Ariel's outburst reveals her confusion. Although she is beginning to accept her grandmother's mortality and the coming of the new baby, she is still unsure of herself and scared of the changes that are occurring in her home.

Ariel's outburst reflects the distance she has put between herself and her grandmother. Like Catherine Hall in *A Gathering of Days*, Ariel separates herself from other women. According to Mikel and Gilligan, "For a girl to disconnect herself from women means to dissociate herself not only from her mother [or, in Ariel's case, her grandmother] but also from herself" (216). Ariel's fear of her grandmother's illness and her insecurity about the new baby cause her to begin this withdrawal. At this stage, many girls begin to repress their voices and keep emotions inside. Ariel's sudden and

emotional outburst shows how much she has been holding in and how difficult it has been for her. She is immediately contrite, fearing her harsh words will hurt her grandmother and seem selfish, rude or mean. Fear causes her to hold her thoughts inside until she loses control. According to Brown and Gilligan's research, Ariel's outburst is healthy, for holding emotions in for fear of what others will think leads eventually to not only loss of speaking, but loss of knowing as well (217). Ariel's outburst puts her back in touch with herself, her thoughts and her needs. Clearing the air and reconnecting with her understanding grandmother allows Ariel to return to work on the quilt voluntarily, on her own terms.

Continuing work on the quilt, Ariel continues to grow and become more comfortable with change. When she finally completes the quilt, Ariel is a very different person. She recognizes this herself: ". . . while everyone waited for the baby, life seemed to be back to normal, but for Ariel nothing would ever be the same. She and Grandma talked and, by using a cane, Grandma was able to go for short walks with her, but Ariel felt a hollowness inside. She knew now that Grandma wouldn't always be there" (Kinsey-Warnock 51). On the day her mother goes to the hospital to have the baby, Ariel escapes the house while she and Grandma wait for her father to call. She climbs to her favorite place in the apple tree, feeling very much alone and overwhelmed by the changes surrounding her. While she sits there, the geese fly over, "their cries touched her and her own thudding heart seemed to beat with the same steady rhythm as their wings" (54). Ariel wonders how the geese know where and when to fly each year. She realizes they pass the knowledge on to each other, "Like Grandma. Grandma had taught her things without making it seem like teaching. When to watch for the geese. Where to look for the lady's slippers and bloodroot in the swamp. What it was like to be an older sister. How to sew a quilt even if you hated sewing" (54-55). Grandma has taught Ariel what it is like to grow up. Many of her most important lessons are learned while piecing the quilt: patience, charity, self-worth and loss.

Ariel's quilt facilitates her growth from child to woman, but for Marguerite Ledoux of Rachel Field's *Calico Bush*, creating a quilt is not a step toward womanhood. The gift of a quilt is recognition for her own steps toward becoming an adult. Marguerite, a strong, spunky, hired girl, saves the family she works for from hostile Indians by giving the Indians food and dancing with them around a Maypole. Marguerite's quick preparation and distribution of food resembles that of an adult woman who is used to feeding and serving men, but her frenzied dancing around the Maypole links her with the Sargent children, who dance with her in desperation. The Indians are so intrigued by the dance they join in the festivities and are so entertained they decide not to attack. Like children themselves, they leave the Sargent homestead gripping scraps of the sheets Marguerite tied to the pole for the dance.

Marguerite's actions reflect her position between the worlds of child and adult; she is still girl enough to think of the Maypole as entertaining, yet old enough to prepare and distribute food, a common task of women. Marguerite's quick thinking and mature actions save the Sargent family and home. In recognition of her acts, neighbor and friend Hepsa Jordan gives Marguerite the "Delectable Mountains" quilt Aunt Hepsa has been working on: "It's yours to finish and keep. You always did fancy that pattern from the first, and I don't know who has earned a better right to it . . . . When its all pieced I'll help you quilt it, an' then you'll have one thing ready toward the time you marry" (192). Marguerite, formerly thought of only as a hired girl with little prospect for marriage, has proved herself to be quick thinking and mature, a deserving girl who might someday make a good match. Hepsa Jordan recognized Marguerite's great step toward adulthood and gives her the "Delectable Mountains" quilt as a symbol of Marguerite's approaching womanhood. Marguerite, alone in a foreign land, has few friends or connections with other women. Aunt Hepsa's gift creates a bond between woman and girl that will help Marguerite as she grows into a woman.

For many young girls, the approach of womanhood is frightening and uncertain.

It is often a period of isolation as girls begin to become confused about themselves and separate from those around them. Strong connections between women help secure a girl's passage into womanhood, and quilting creates these kinds of bonds. Learning to quilt does not just involve stitching with a needle and thread; it requires patience, determination and the self-exploration required to make the transition from child to woman. It was the responsibility of mothers and grandmothers to teach young women to quilt; as Beverly Guy-Sheftall points out in *Double Stitch,* a collection of writings by black women about mother/daughter relationships: "daughters acknowledge how their mothers provided road maps and patterns, a "template" which enabled them to create and define themselves as they moved from childhood through adolescence to adulthood" (61). Adolescent novelists often use the time when a young girl learns to quilt as a period of transition for their young characters. During the time it takes to piece a quilt, important events can lead to revelations about the quilter that can affect the character's movement into womanhood. In this way, the quilt becomes a material manifestation of the girl's passage into adulthood. The act of quilting provides time for self exploration; creating a quilt also allows the quilter to "create" herself while she stitches.

Chapter 4

Reverse Stitch:
Male Characters and Quilt Symbolism

While quilting is often thought of as a woman's art, men quilt as well. Author John Rice Irwin encountered a few male quilters in his research on quilting in Appalachia. Irwin found Alex Stewart and Tyler Bunch, both quilters and both "tough as men can be. They have been prodigious workers, they have mastered dozens of crafts and trades, and the are both gentle and compassionate men. Both . . . were as proud of their ability to quilt as they were of their work as loggers, miners, trappers, etc." (97). Male quilters are so rare Irwin feels he must present Stewart and Bunch's stereotypically masculine traits before crediting their unusual talent for quilting. Irwin also mentions that, although strong men, these male quilters were also "gentle and compassionate," traits traditionally attributed to women. Irwin insinuates these "strong men" are very much in touch with what society considers to be female emotions and, while the connection between these traits and the practice of a typically female art form is not specifically made, Irwin seems to believe the two are connected.

Quilting is so typically a female art that male authors seldom use quilts as symbols in their writing. Almost no books for children or adolescents written by men use quilts as symbols. However, several women authors have written books about quilts that have boys or men as main characters; *The Dream Quilt* by Amy and Jesse Spicer Zerner and L. M. Boston's *Treasure at Green Knowe* are both books about adolescent boys who make connections and learn about themselves because of a patchwork quilt. However, books by men about quilts are conspicuously absent in adolescent fiction.

It is interesting that, in books by women, quilts can make connections and explore

history for male characters, but quilts very seldom act as a voice for boys or men. In a search of over one hundred novels about quilts for adolescents and children only one contains a male character who actually quilts. In Lisa Campbell Ernst's picture book *Sam Johnson and the Blue Ribbon Quilt,* farmer Sam Johnson decides he enjoys quilting after he mends a pigpen awning. After being refused admission to the Rosedale Women's Quilting Club, Sam founds the Rosedale Men's Quilting Club and prepares a quilt to enter in the county fair contest. Sam Johnson and the other members of his quilting club are alone among male characters in books about quilts; Ernst's picture book is one of very few children's texts about male quilters. It is significant that the text is a picture book, geared toward an audience of small children, rather than an adolescent novel aimed at an older audience. Adolescent authors seem to reinforce the stereotype that quilting is women's work. It is permissible to present a male quilter to a young audience, at an age when even boys need to connect with those around them; however, it is seemingly not permissible to present men doing "women's work" to an audience containing older boys who may be influenced by the connections quilting represents. According to William Pollack, clinical psychologist, founding member of the Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity of the American Psychological Association, and author of *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Boys From the Myth of Boyhood*, boys are encouraged by society to break off connections with mothers and other family members when they reach adolescence. Books using the patchwork quilt as a symbol stress emotional connections between quilters, and it is unusual to encounter adolescent boys making such connections.

Despite society's discouragement, Pollack stresses the importance of emotional connections and self-expression for boys' development: "[Many boys] are suffering silently inside - from confusion, a sense of isolation, and despair. They feel detached from their own selves, and often feel alienated from parents, siblings and peers. Many boys feel a loneliness that may last throughout boyhood and continue into adult life"

(xxi). Pollack's studies claim boys suffer from "The Boy Code," the set of expectations society forces on boys and young men. These expectations are restricting, a "gender straitjacket" that forces boys away from their families and out of their comfort zone into the world of men (6).

Boys are expected to withdraw from relationships with their mothers and other family members to conform to "The Boy Code" and become real men: "Mother is expected to 'cut the apron strings' that tie the son to her and, indeed, that connect him to the entire family . . . . Many boys are pushed out of the family and expected to be independent" (Pollack xxiv). Adolescence is a time of separation and transition for all children; strengthening rather than severing family and emotional ties can help make the transition easier. Pollack's studies of the significance of emotional connections for modern boys connects closely with Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan's studies of young girls. Adolescent boys and girls share many of the same experiences and the same sense of isolation; the road into adulthood often becomes a road of isolation for both genders. Brown and Gilligan observe that adolescent girls often withdraw from relationships with their mothers and other women as they prepare to enter adult relationships with men (216); boys are encouraged to separate from their mothers and other women in preparation for becoming men.

Quilts often help strengthen important ties between women and girls; they can do the same for boys. In literature for adolescents, the few books that contain male characters use quilts to strengthen bonds between young boys and their families. Quilts also symbolize what is needed to help adolescent boys grow up healthy: understanding, security and expression. In *The Dream Quilt* and L.M. Boston's "Green Knowe" series, young boys are able to become independent through their connections with older women. They gain confidence through their ties to female relatives, but they explore life and their inner selves alone. The male characters in both stories experience most of their adventures alone; both boys learn about themselves through what Nancy Goldberger

describes as a "male" way of knowing: individual and independent self exploration (249). While connecting with women, they continue to think and act independently and continue to be less reliant on others for direction and less concerned with others' opinions.

In *The Dream Quilt* by Amy and Jesse Spicer Zerner, the quilt that belonged to Alex's great- great grandfather serves these many functions. Young Alex is away from home for the first time, visiting with his great-aunt Rachel. Alex is a very young boy, but he is trusted to go alone on the train to Aunt Rachel's, leaving his parents behind on the platform in the city. The journey seems to be one of Alex's first steps toward distancing himself from his mother and his immediate family. His mother reassures him about the trip: "It will be exciting. There's nothing like that first trip on your own. It's part of growing up" (3). Alex does not seem to need much reassurance; he is very excited about his big step toward independence. He feels comfortable with motherly Aunt Rachel. She continues to encourage him toward new experiences and independence, suggesting he climb down the apple tree outside his window instead of using the stairs. Alex balks at this experience, however, not quite ready to try this new experience. Having never climbed a tree, he is rather afraid to try it. The train ride seems to have been enough adventure for one day; Alex leaves his room and goes down the stairs and outside (4-5). Alex does not share his nervousness with Aunt Rachel, saying simply "I'll go with you" (4) as she leaves his bedroom. He seems to feel awkward about expressing his fear, as if a young "man" should never be afraid.

At bedtime, Alex does share his fear with Aunt Rachel. Faced with sleeping alone in an unfamiliar room, he asks, "What if I can't sleep?" (7) His fear is strong enough to share, and Aunt Rachel recognizes his need to be comforted. She presents him with a "dream quilt" made by his great-great grandmother for his great-great grandfather, a sea captain (8). The dream quilt represents an important connection for Alex, tying him to his own past. It symbolizes the security and comfort Alex needs to sleep well. By presenting him with the quilt, Aunt Rachel acknowledges his fear without belittling it; her

actions are as comforting as the quilt itself. The quilt creates a tie between Alex and Aunt Rachel; it represents their shared ancestor as well as a shared understanding.

Alex's quilt also represents exotic imaginings rather than the familiarities of home represented in most women's quilts. When Aunt Rachel presents Alex with the quilt, he is disappointed and not very interested in the old quilt. He becomes more intrigued when she tells him ". . . it has been all around the world. Who knows the sights it has seen" (Zerner and Zerner 7). The sites that Alex sees while sleeping under the quilt are as exotic as any his great-great-grandfather might have experienced; each night he has fabulous fantasy adventures in his sleep. He consorts with dragons, spiders and princesses and becomes quite a hero. *Recollections,* an adolescent quilt novel by Judith Baker Montano, shares a similar plot; however, the stories that Alex's quilt represents to him are not the stories of the home or of family history shared by Emma's grandmother in *Recollections*. Emma's stories provied security and stability among people she knows, while Alex's stories are the distant imaginings of a young boy's mind. They do not express Alex's connections to other people; they express his desire for independence and freedom. As a young boy, he cannot wander far from home, but under the dream quilt, he can travel anywhere his imagination can take him, from deep forests and dark towers to an octopus's cave under the sea. His only familiar companion is Daisy the cat. No adults accompany him on his adventures. He keeps company with animals and beings of his own invention, severing all ties to the real, waking world, just as adolescent boys are expected to severe ties with those around them.

Despite this difference, Alex's quilt connects him with his great-great-grandparents and his Aunt Rachel while developing his security and independence. Because he has been enculturated differently than female characters, it is ironic that these are the same types of connections and developments experienced by women quilters. In his dreams, Alex is strong and independent, but while awake, he is a small boy away from home for the first time. The quilt was made by his great-great grandmother, owned

by his great-great grandfather, and given to him by Aunt Rachel. It is through his connections with them that Alex becomes independent; he depends on Aunt Rachel to assuage his fear of sleeplessness, and she responds by giving him the quilt. In *Recollections,* Emma is frightened by her grandmother's death. Connecting with her grandmother through the stories of the quilt allows Emma to deal with her fear and become more confident.

Connections between young boys and older women are common in young adult novels. Much of the forced separation that exists between mothers and sons is absent in the relationships between young boys and grandmothers, or grandmother figures. Older women often reach out and connect with young boys in ways that facilitate boys' development. However, these ties continue to be discouraged by the majority of modern society. According to psychologist Mary Roth Walsh, the modern male movement encourages men to get back in touch with their maleness and develop bonds with other men. While connections with other men are certainly beneficial for boys, connections with women also encourage healthy development. Men and boys also continue to struggle to discuss their emotions (400). Boys often make comfortable connections with women who encourage them to discuss their emotions, facilitating emotional health and awarness.

L.M. Boston's *The Children of Green Knowe* also tells the story of a young boy connecting with his great-grandmother, the first family member he has built a relationship with. There is no quilt in the first book of Boston's series, but the connections established in *The Children of Green Knowe* are the basis for the stories and connections told through quilts in the second book, *Treasure at Green Knowe*. Part of Green Knowe's treasure is several pieces of patchwork that contain the stories of its past residents.

Like *The Dream Quilt,* Boston's *Children of Green Know* also begins with a young boy making a train trip alone. While traveling to his great-grandmother's house,

Tolly dreams about having a family. The boy seems to be completely alone; his mother is dead and his father has remarried and lives in Burma, far away from Tolly's English boarding school. Tolly feels alone within a society that forces sensitive boys into isolation, discouraging them from depending on others or expressing their feelings or weaknesses. Society strictly adheres to the ideal conventions of manhood: strength, independence, solitude and silence. It forces young men like Tolly to conform to these conventions or be labeled "weak," "wimpy" or "girlish." Boys that do not or cannot conform feel even more alone.

Tolly has never met his great-grandmother nor seen her home, but he hopes for the best: ". . . she was his own great-grandmother, and that was something . . . he wondered if she would be frighteningly old" (*The Children* 4). She is, of course, very old, but Granny is also everything Tolly is searching for. While he stays with her, Tolly establishes bonds with someone for the first time. He is not at all afraid of her; in fact, he loves her dearly right from the start, feeling as if he already knows her well. His connection with his great-grandmother and the fascinating stories she tells about his ancestors and the history of the house, Green Knowe, make Tolly forget his loneliness. Tolly does not only gain confidence from his new connections to his past, he actually makes friends with the characters in Granny's stories. Toby, Linnet and Alexander, who lived in the house hundreds of years before, actually appear to Tolly and become his friends and playmates. They are the first playmates Tolly has ever had his own age and they help him prepare to become more friendly with real children.

Tolly's experiences at Green Knowe during his vacation begin to prepare him for growing up. In *Real Boys,* William Pollack claims "Boys are immensely loving and they yearn for relationships more than we have ever recognized" (65). Tolly expresses this yearning on his way to Greene Knowe, wishing for a brother or sister or any family to love (*The Children* 3). He finds what he is looking for when he connects with his great-grandmother, learning to love and show love for the first time. Like most boys, Tolly

shows his love through his actions toward his great-grandmother. Pollack states many boys are afraid to show their love through "feminine emotion"; Tolly doesn't speak often of his feelings, but he shows his love for his great-grandmother in his consideration of her needs and his thoughtful search for just the right Christmas gift for her.

Learning to love his great-grandmother and making friends with Toby, Linnet and Alex, his "imaginary playmates," prepares Tolly for his next challenge: becoming friends with other boys. Connecting with other boys is important for young men; many advocates of the men's movement advocate developing connections with boys to minimize the influence of mothers, grandmothers and female teachers (Walsh 399). Tolly's developing friendships do not change his relationship with his great-grandmother, however. Granny provides Tolly with the stability and confidence he needs to feel comfortable around other boys. Their connection remains strong even after Tolly returns to school.

Treasure of Green Knowe, the second book in the series, continues strengthening the connections and emotional security Tolly begins to develop in the the first one. Again, the book begins on the train, with Tolly traveling toward Green Knowe for his Easter break, eager to renew the ties he established with all his friends there at Christmas. He is still awkward with other boys his age, but not as lonely as he used to be. He is anxious to get "home" to Green Knowe and even more anxious to see his great-grandmother and his phantom friends.

Because his Christmas playmates are gone, Tolly feels almost as lonely as he did before his first visit to Green Knowe. When Granny brings out several very old patchwork quilts that need mending, Tolly becomes interested: "Tolly had long been familiar with the quilts [of the house]. . . . Spread on her knees and rucked up on the floor, they were both more intimate and more intriguing. The colors and patterns were so lively in the firelight Tolly immediately sat down to enjoy them" (9). The quilts are indeed very lively, as they contain the stories of a whole set of new friends for Tolly to

become acquainted with.

Tolly soon overcomes his disappointment over the absence of Toby, Linnet and Alexander when he begins to connect with new friends in Granny's quilt stories. The pieces in the quilt come from clothing worn by family members over two hundred years ago, and through Granny's stories they begin to come alive again. When Tolly crawls under the quilt on his bed the first night of his visit, he recognizes some of the patches. The same fabric appeared in the quilt Granny was mending. Tolly realizes, "There are bits of those people everywhere" (*Treasure* 15). They still haunt the house they lived in, and Tolly begins to recognize their presence around him. Soon he makes friends with them as he made friends with Toby, Linnet and Alexander.

By becoming intimate with pieces and personalities from his own past, Tolly is learning about and exploring himself. The old quilts were made long ago by the grandmother of Tolly's new friends; they contain many pieces of Oldknow family history. Granny shares the history with Tolly; he is the only remaining family member for her to pass the history on to. She is old and wise; Granny "Old-Know" knows about the past and the impact it has on the present and the future. Through the quilt and its stories, she continues the process she began during Tolly's first visit. Granny is making secure connections for Tolly, providing him with a past and giving him the family he yearns for.

The Tolly that grows out of his time at Green Knowe begins to fit what William Pollack calls the "myth" of the young boy: "the rascal and the scamp, the mischievous lad who loves to run and be loud, whose pockets are filled with junk he considers to be treasure, with a frisky puppy as his constant companion" (xxi). Tolly spends most of his days outside fishing, climbing trees and playing with his puppy, Orlando. He collects bits and pieces of old things out of the garden, "treasures" left there by his friends of hundreds of years ago. Despite his gradual conformity to what is expected of a young boy, Tolly remains the type of sensitive, open boy Pollack encourages society to accept.

Tolly is not tough, nor does he separate himself from those around him. He is shy, but he is eager to be friends and connect with other people. Like many young boys, his "apron strings" were cut when he was quite young; he was forced to separate from his mother and the rest of his family prematurely (Pollack xxiv). Because of this, Tolly suffers a "crisis of self-confidence and identity" (xxv) that improves only when he finds stability with his great-grandmother at Greene Knowe through connections made through the quilt and friendship with his own ancestors.

The new friendships Tolly finds lead him to try new things. His admiration for Toby leads him to learn to ride; the stories Granny tells him about Susan and Jacob, his new friends, lead him to climb trees and explore the chimneys of the house. His knowledge of his ancestors helps him to explore himself and define his identity. By incorporating pieces of his past into his life, Tolly creates an individual self that is sensitive and caring, as well as independent.

Characters like Tolly and *The Dream Quilt*'s Alex are able to escape the suffering William Pollack has found inside many young boys. Many boys suffer from "confusion, a sense of isolation, and despair. They feel detached from their own selves, and often feel alienated from parents, siblings, and peers" (Pollack xxi). Girls often experience the same sense of confusion and isolation. Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan find "women's psychological development within patriarchal societies and male-voiced cultures is inherently traumatic. The pressure on boys to dissociate themselves from women early in childhood is analogous to the pressure girls feel to take themselves out of relationship with themselves and with women as they reach adolescence" (216). These patterns of development are traumatic for both genders; boys suffer from the pressure to dissociate themselves from their families too early.

Adolescent girls share this experience of isolation; lack of self-confidence and society's emphasis on male-female relationships lead girls to remove themselves from relationships with other women. Severing these ties leads to severance from the self.

Many young girls lose their own identity in their isolation and become selfless, voiceless women who do not recognize themselves or their voices. They share this experience with the many young men who lose themselves in the "gender straitjacket."

The loss of self among young people can be avoided when young people establish and maintain strong relationships with adults and with each other. The establishment of connections with caring, nurturing adult women can be extremely vital to the self-confidence of young people. Quilts often symbolize these connections, and literature about quilts is about the connections that can exist between people. The act of quilting encourages these connections between women, allowing them to share knowledge and work together. When men become involved in the quilting process, they are provided with the means to express their emotions and connect with others. Male characters in adolescent fiction that learn to appreciate quilts also learn to appreciate ties with other people, and because of these ties, they develop into more healthy and well-adjusted men. Using quilts as symbols in adolescent novels about boys allows authors to develop their male characters outside of the typical male stereotype and break out of the "gender straitjacket" that often confines young boys in our society.

Chapter 5

Quilting Connections: Binding Women Together A Conclusion

The making of a patchwork quilt joins together many scraps of leftover fabric. Careful piecing of many different patterns and types creates a beautiful, dominant pattern, often with many subtle patterns hidden within. For women, the centers of home and family, the act of quilting is much like binding together their loved ones. Dominant family patterns and connections are immediately apparent, while more subtle patterns are distinguishable only upon closer inspection. The threads that connect patchwork are much like the ties that stitch a family together. Binding and often concealed, they sometimes come unraveled, but can be lovingly and carefully stitched back together. In literature, female characters often connect with each other while stitching the pieces of their lives into pleasing patterns.

As the traditional centers of home and family, women are often mediators and peacemakers. They help create bonds between loved ones and help keep the bonds strong. Connections between family members are important, and ties between women are essential for healthy development. The act of quilting became and remains popular among women because it also allows for the establishment of ties between quilters. Quilting can be a unique expression of creativity, but it can also be a communal activity finished by many women. Quilting bees were extremely popular during the nineteenth century, and quilting guilds and groups continue to be popular today. Together, women sew together the top, batting and backing of a quilt, using tiny, expert stitches to add further artistry and refinement to an already unique work. While they make their stitches women share their joys and sorrows, telling their life stories and sharing their secrets,

stitching their conversation into the layers of quilt before them.

Connecting through the sharing of voice is vital to women. Carol Gilligan finds within women "a relational voice: a voice that insists on staying in connection and most centrally staying in connection with women, so the psychological separations which have long been justified in the name of autonomy, selfhood, and freedom no longer appear as the *sine qua non* of human development, but as a human problem" (xiii). The act of separating from others can be disastrous for women and young girls because it alienates them not only from each other, but also from their own identities. For women and girls to explore their inner selves, they must reflect on their own thoughts and experiences. According to Mary Belenky et al, "In order for reflection to occur, the oral and written forms of language must pass back and forth between persons who both speak and listen or read and write - sharing, expanding, and reflecting on each other's experiences. Such interchanges lead to ways of knowing that enable individuals to enter into the social and intellectual life of their community" (26). Making connections through language makes connections between women. By sharing news, gossip, joys and concerns while quilting, women establish bonds that allow them to begin and continue the self-reflection necessary to develop a true sense of self.

Relationships are so important to women that many women define themselves based only on those relationships, neglecting the inner reflection and exploration necessary for a sense of self. Nancy Chodorow states "While boys define their identity by difference and separation, not relation, to the mother, girls continue to define themselves relationally . . . the basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate" (43-44). Women define themselves and their personalities by their relations to other people. Mothers and daughters can develop close relationships and identify with each other because daughters are not forced away from their mothers the way sons often are (Lundin 208-209).

When women fail to connect with others, or when they separate themselves from

others, they begin to lose the sense of self developed through connecting with other women. Adolescence is a common time for this separation to occur. Many girls begin to separate themselves from other women to prepare for relationships with men, often resulting in loss of courage, self-confidence and voice. Girls often lose touch with their emotions and begin to silence themselves because they feel powerless and alone (Brown and Gilligan 217).

The pattern of separation that becomes obvious among adolescent girls is an important theme in literature written for adolescents. In books that use quilts as symbols, quilts are often used to bridge the gap that develops between female characters and those around them. Quilts often "stitch together" relationships that have begun to unravel under the pressures of adolescence. Most adolescent characters are taught to quilt by older female relatives, and the very act of learning to quilt often begins to reestablish connections between female characters. This opportunity is important for all the women in the novels. The "meeting at the crossroads" between female characters "creates an opportunity for women to join girls and by doing so to reclaim lost voices and lost strengths, to strengthen girls' courage as they enter adolescence by offering girls resonant relationships, and in this way to move with girls toward creating a psychologically healthier world" for women (Brown and Gilligan 6). In literature, quilts and quilting often act as the crossroads that bring characters together, allowing them to connect and gain strength from their relations with each other.

The "Mariner's Compass" quilt Catherine Hall creates in Joan Blos's *Gathering of Days* brings Catherine and her stepmother Ann to such a crossroads. When Ann tells Catherine she must make a quilt, Catherine protests because she does not know how. Ann offers to teach her:

> "All that [knowledge of sewing] should make it easy . . . . Besides, I am here now, to teach you."
>
> Then she stretched out her hand to me. Wherat I cried, as I'd not

done before - nor have I done for months and years - and when at last I looked at her I saw her own eyes glistened. (86)

The initial connection between Catherine and her stepmother allows Catherine to touch her own emotions for the first time in many years. She has not had such a bond with a woman since her mother's death, and her desire to be a good, obedient daughter and to prepare to be a good wife lead her to keep many of her own emotions hidden. When the making of the quilt establishes a bond between Catherine and her new stepmother, it frees the emotions Catherine has been holding inside. Brown and Gilligan's study finds that girls at age seven or eight begin to monitor what they say and what others around them say (45). Catherine was eight when her mother died, just the age at which girls begin to question the value and validity of their voices. Because her uncertainties about herself and her voice began at the same time she became disconnected from her mother, Catherine also became disconnected from herself. It is not until another woman reaches out to her, in words and in action, that she again contacts her inner self and, suddenly and violently, expresses the emotions she has been holding inside since her mother's death. This new connection with her self and her stepmother allows Catherine to grow further. Time spent working on the quilt is also spent working with her stepmother, and the two become much closer. While she stitches her quilt, she finds the strength within herself to face her grief over her best friend's death, the departure of another friend, and finally her own departure from home. When Catherine leaves home, her connections with her family are strong enough to span the distance between them.

Quilts are used by another adolescent author to establish and strengthen connections across great distances and across time. Ann Rinaldi uses a quilt to connect three sisters, as well as overcome the disconnection of three generations of their descendants through almost sixty years in her *Quilt Trilogy*. Rinaldi wrote the books out of a "desire to write about a family that gets torn apart, seemingly by events outside the home, but actually due to dark undercurrents from within, undercurrents that reach out

from the past" (*A Stitch in Time* 293). Rinaldi's choice of a quilt as a symbol of family events is fitting; the dominant pattern of events outside the home appears to separate the Chelmsfords, but it is actually the subtle pattern of internal events that drives the family apart. Rinaldi wanted the Chelmsford quilt to "survive the years when the family unity is all but gone" (293). The quilt becomes separated, like the family, but is reunited when later generations establish new trust and connect with each other in new ways.

The very making of the Chlemsford quilt is about establishing connections. Each time Hannah, Abby or Thankful asks someone for a piece of fabric to add to the quilt, they establish a connection. Hannah, the oldest of the sisters, realizes the significance of each connection and labors over decisions about who to trust. Thankful, the youngest sister, also hesitates at first about making connections, but for a different reason. Her father recognizes Thankful's disassociation from her sisters: "She's a restless, bright child. She should have been a boy" (*A Stitch in Time* 74). Hannah and Abby define themselves as most women do, by their relationships with others. Thankful, however, separates herself from all others as Nancy Chodorow says boys do, "defining their identity by difference and separation" (43-44). Thankful's mother died when she was very young, and she has never established any connections with her older sisters, even Hannah, who acted as her mother. Consequently, Thankful does not experience the separation process many girls experience with adolescence. She does not lose her voice, and she does not suddenly separate herself from women to prepare herself for relationships with men because she has never been close to women. Her closest confidant is her father. She is outspoken and very independent, so independent from the women in her family that she convinces her father to allow her to leave the other women behind and accompany him on a dangerous expedition in the west.

Because of Thankful's disconnection with her sisters, it is not surprising that she wants little to do with the quilt. The quilt represents trust; Thankful trusts no one and cannot be trusted herself. Because she does not connect with her family, she cannot be

trusted to value family secrets or share the concerns of other family members. Emotional connections are based on trust. The quilt represents connections established by trust, and Thankful refuses to connect with anyone. Before Thankful leaves for her journey, Hannah gives her a section of the quilt. Thankful has no interest in it. It is not until she becomes a woman and returns to the crossroads to finally connect with Old Mother, her Shawnee mother, that Thankful can begin to appreciate the connection with her white family the quilt symbolizes. The piece of patchwork that once meant so little to her now reconnects her with her sisters across years and miles.

In *Broken Days* and *The Blue Door*, the other books in Rinaldi's trilogy, the sections of the Chelmsford family quilt provide a means of establishing connections between later generations of Chelmsford descendants. The quilt was made to represent connections that already existed, but after its division and the fragmentation of the family, it becomes a catalyst for new connections. Thankful's daughter, Walking Breeze, uses the quilt to establish connections between herself and her mother's family. When she finally presents the quilt to Hannah, it is a symbol of her right to be a part of the family . Still later, Abby's granddaughter also tries to use the quilt to establish connections with her grandmother's family. In both cases, it is not until the quilt is found and united with the other pieces that connections between the women begin to grow. The final reunion of the Chelmsford family occurs when Nancy, Ebie and Amanda agree to gather together to stitch together the three pieces of the quilt that have been passed down to them. By stitching together the pieces of the quilt, they symbolically reunite the three Chelmsford sisters and stitch together the separate branches of the Chelmsford family. Reuniting the quilt also allows the women to reconnect with the three sisters across many years and to establish connections with each other.

Other adolescent novels use quilts to establish connections between characters from different generations. In Natalie Kinsey-Warnock's *The Canada Geese Quilt,* Rachel Field's *Calico Bush* and Patricia Beatty's *O the Red Rose Tree*, young characters

are joined together with old through the act of quilting. Older characters like Mrs. Hankinson in *O the Red Rose Tree,* Aunt Hepsa in *Calico Bush* and Ariel's grandmother in *The Canada Geese Quilt* do not merely instruct young characters in the art of quilting. According to Brown and Gilligan, older women benefit from "join[ing] girls and by doing so, reclaim lost voices and lost strengths, strengthen girls' voices and girls' courage as they enter adolescence by offering girls resonant relationships, and in this way move with girls toward creating a psychologically healthier world and a more caring and just society" (6).

Each elderly character benefits from her relationship with a young girl in a different way. For Mrs. Hankinson, a poor, sickly woman who is alone at the end of her life, friendship with Amanda Barnett and her friends offers the chance to fulfill a lifelong dreams. Mrs. Hankinson is able to "reclaim [her] lost voice" by creating the quilt "O the Red Rose Tree," something she could not have done without the help of her young friends. By teaching them to sew, she reclaims some of her lost strength and sense of value. For a lonely woman believing she has nothing left to offer the world, the opportunity to instruct the girls in needlework provides a sense of purpose and a legacy the girls will remember forever.

Aunt Hepsa of *Calico Bush* seeks a woman to share her time with. Living alone with two men, Aunt Hepsa welcomes Marguerite's company and admires the unusually refined manner of the servant girl. Marguerite not only helps Aunt Hepsa with her work, she is a willing pupil for Aunt Hepsa to teach. Aunt Hepsa has no children of her own. Bonding with Marguerite establishes the connections she might have had with a daughter or granddaughter. Teaching Marguerite to weave and quilt allows Aunt Hepsa to leave a part of herself with the girl. She offers Marguerite the valuable lessons of work and life she might have offered her own daughter if she had one. By doing this, Aunt Hepsa reconnects with her self as a woman and re-affirms her place and value in the community.

The connection between Ariel and her grandmother in *The Canada Geese Quilt* is

severely tested when Grandma suffers a debilitating stroke. Because of the strong connection she and Ariel have already made through the time they have share together and, recently, through collaboration on a quilt for the new baby, Ariel is able to reach out to her ill grandmother as no one else can. The connection between the two women is strong enough to overcome Grandma's depression and Ariel's fear of her grandmother's mortality. Without the connection strengthened by quilting, Grandma might have remained bedridden and forgotten "life is so good" (Kinsey-Warnock 45). Her connection with Ariel allows Grandma to discover hidden strength and a love for life she does not realize she has.

The young characters in the novels experience many of the same benefits as their older companions. Sharing relationships with older women gives girls the chance to establish "resonant relationships . . . . bringing women's voices fully into the world" (Brown and Gilligan 6-7). The connection between voice and self allows girls to find their own identity and preserve it through the turbulent years of adolescence and into womanhood. The act of creating a quilt for the new baby allows Ariel to discover what is truly important to her and to face her fears. This inner journey, prompted by her relationship with her grandmother and the sewing of the quilt, assures Ariel of her place in the family. At first unsure of what her place will be after the baby's birth, Ariel realizes after her self-exploration that she is not alone, she will always be connected with her grandmother in a special way, "in [her] memories and in [her] heart" (Kinsey-Warnock 60).

O the Red Rose Tree's Amanda Barnett does not seek to find her place within her family, but instead her place outside it. Amanda connects not with one of her own family members, but instead with a special friend. Tired of being bossed and dictated to by her outspoken grandmother, Amanda seeks to bond with Mrs. Hankinson. Mrs. Hankinson is the type of grandmother Amanda wants, an older woman with talent and grace who is polite and respectful to Amanda and her friends despite their youth. Mrs. Hankinson has

much to teach Amanda, as does her grandmother, but Mrs. Hankinson teaches with patience and love. By bonding with Mrs. Hankinson and helping her create her quilt, Amanda directly opposes her grandmother's wishes. Amanda begins to establish her own identity outside her immediate family and assert her independence. By doing so, she finally finds her place within the family. Her parents recognize her as a growing woman with her own mind, and she begins to assume the role of a young woman within the family. The lessons Mrs. Hankinson teaches while stitching the quilt help Amanda assume the tasks of a woman as well as the emotional pressures that come with adulthood.

Marguerite Ledoux in *Calico Bush* perhaps benefits more than any other character by her connection with an older woman. Completely alone, cut off from her culture and scorned by the family she lives with, Marguerite struggles to hang on to any piece of herself that remains during her servitude. Marguerite's isolation is not the isolation that girls often inflict upon themselves as adolescence; her isolation is real and enforced by those around her. As a foreigner and an outcast, she struggles to hang on to her sense of self worth. Because she is seen as unimportant and worthless by those around her, Marguerite must fight to hold on to the confidence and identity she developed as a child. Most of her confidence and identity developed from her relationship with her grandmother, but after her grandmother's death and the start of her servitude, Marguerite was forced into the isolation that often accompanies adolescence. When Aunt Hepsa begins to reach out to Marguerite, Marguerite's sense of self worth begins to increase. By simply recognizing the girl needs a bath and clean clothes, Aunt Hepsa adds confidence and worth to Marguerite's self image. Learning to weave continues to increase Margurite's self-esteem. Because Aunt Hepsa recognizes Marguerite as a person, Marguerite remembers she is still a person: "You'd better call me Aunt Hepsa, same's the rest do . . . . I'm not one for puttin' on cornstarch airs. Bound-Out Girl or no, its all one to me so long as you're smart and sensible" (Field 51). This simple

acknowledgment of her humanity makes Marguerite realize how far she has moved away from the girl she once was. By seeing her as a person, providing her with clean clothes and soap and water to wash, Aunt Hepsa so successfully connects Marguerite with herself and her past that Marguerite begins to sing a song from her childhood (Field 68).

Later in their acquaintance, Aunt Hepsa again connects with Marguerite when she gives Marguerite her "Delectable Mountains" quilt to finish. By giving her the quilt, Aunt Hepsa again acknowledges Marguerite as a worthy person: "You always did fancy that pattern right from the first, an' I don't know who's earned a better right to it" (Field 192). Aunt Hepsa goes one step further when she tells Marguerite upon finishing the quilt, Marguerite will "have one thing ready against the time" she marries (192). Aunt Hepsa is the first person to voice the idea that Marguerite might marry. As a servant and a foreigner, it is entirely possible Marguerite will never find a husband. Aunt Hepsa's confidence in her inspires new confidence within Marguerite; she decides to stay with the Sargents despite their offers of freedom and build a new life for herself among the people she has begun to connect with.

Piecing patchwork quilts often represent the initiation of a new life for young girls. The adolescent years are a period of transition, connecting childhood and adulthood. Throughout history, quilting has been symbolic of women's work and the duties of the home. The patchwork quilt is used often in historical novels as it was used historically. The act of creating a quilt connects hundreds of pieces of fabric with thread, and at the same time, it connects the women involved in the creation as well. Quilts also connect women of different generations and establish ties across time and distance. These connections were vital to women in the nineteenth century, as Carol Smith-Rosenberg points out in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*: "evidence suggests that eighteenth- and nineteenth- century women routinely formed emotional ties with other women . . . . Indeed, from at least the late eighteenth through the mid- nineteenth century, a female world of varied and yet highly structured

relationships appears to have been an essential aspect of American society" (53). It is just as essential in twentieth-century society, where adolescent girls need to bond through relationships with each other and with other women to grow into healthy women themselves. In adolescent novels about quilts, quilts are used to encourage and develop bonds, providing a historical precedent for an important aspect of modern adolescent development. The patchwork quilt, historically an important part of creating friendships between women, becomes an important symbol of connections in twentieth century adolescent literature. Quilts connect many different aspects of characters' lives and development. Piecing and keeping quilts bring together women's creativity, voice, history and relationships. Quilting connects child to woman, helping girls stitch the turbulent pieces of adolescence into the pattern of adulthood.

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